STAR WARS: THE ACOLYTE UNCOVERING THE DARK SIDE OF THE FORCE

# TOTAL FILM

HIT MAN
RICHARD LINKLATER'S ACTION ROMANCE SHOOTS TO THRILL

ISSUE 350!
THE BEST (AND WORST) FILMS FROM OUR COVERS

+

VIGGO MORTENSEN
ARAGORN GOES WEST

EXCLUSIVE!

# FURIOSA

ANYA TAYLOR-JOY HITS FULL THROTTLE IN THE MAD MAX SAGA'S WILD NEW CHAPTER

PLUS DOCTOR WHO DAISY RIDLEY BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH GEORGE MACKAY TWISTERS JENNIFER LOPEZ JOKER 2

FUTURE

# Films in Concert

Royal Albert Hall

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**Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows™ Part 2** //
Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark™

**with a live symphony orchestra**

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# Welcome to

TOTAL FILM

THE SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE

**It's not every day you turn 350. But I like to think *Total Film* still looks good on it, and being able to put out a print mag in this day and age is a privilege that's not lost on us. We had to mark the occasion of our 350th in some way – without it descending into a complete navel-gazing love-in – so we did what we've always done, really, which is focus on the films. We sat down as a team and pored over all 349 previous covers to select the 10 best movies that have ever fronted *TF*.**

It wasn't easy to narrow it down, but we've ended up with a list of 10 certifiable bangers that represent the highlights of more than 25 years of publishing. And, because we didn't want to let ourselves off the hook that easily (and, honestly, it's as fun to look back on the WTFs as much as the soaring successes), we've also selected the worst films to have ever graced our front page, including one stinker that actually appeared in that premium position *twice*. We'd love to hear what your picks would've been, so drop us a line if any cover stories are particularly close to your heart (or if there are any that make you gasp, 'What the hell were you thinking?').

But that's just one feature in another packed issue. It feels fitting to have a spin-off to one of the best films of our lifetime on the cover this month – Jordan Farley is speaking to the stars and filmmakers behind *Furiosa*, the epic origin story of *Mad Max: Fury Road*'s breakout character. Plus, we've also got you covered on *Star Wars: The Acolyte*, Richard Linklater's *Hit Man*, Viggo Mortensen, *Atlas*, *Doctor Who* and Benedict Cumberbatch's new Netflix show. As much as we love looking back on our past, we'll never not be excited about the future of movies.

## Enjoy the issue!

Matt

MATT MAYTUM, EDITOR
@MATTMAYTUM

## CALL SHEET
THIS ISSUE'S EXTRAS

DEPUTY EDITOR
JORDAN FARLEY
@JORDANFARLEY

Chris Hemsworth had been to the Grand Prix the day we spoke about *Furiosa* for our cover feature: 'When they say, "Start your engines," and everything fires up... I was like, "This is like a normal day on a Mad Max set."'

REVIEWS EDITOR
MATTHEW LEYLAND
@TOTALFILM_MATTL

Doing interviews for *Star Wars: The Acolyte* was a blast. Had a cat-off with Amandla Stenberg (hers demanded more attention!) and discussed two of my fave topics with Charlie Barnett: Carrie Fisher and Scotch eggs.

EDITOR-AT-LARGE (ACTING NEWS EDITOR)
JAMIE GRAHAM
@JAMIE_GRAHAM9

The last time I interviewed Viggo Mortensen, he told me off for asking too many (three) *Lord of the Rings* questions. Turn to page 54 to see how he responded this time...

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
KEVIN HARLEY
@KEVINSHARLEY

Had a lovely Zoom chat with *Doctor Who*'s Ncuti Gatwa, Millie Gibson and Russell T Davies about everything from the Doc's wardrobe to Cherry's tea, all fuelled by the added Artron energy of copious Mini Eggs.

CONTRIBUTOR
SIMON BLAND
@SITWEETSTOO

I had a ball reassessing 1994's *The Flintstones* with director Brian Levant. A wall of retro figures flanked him during our Zoom chat and he revealed he has an entire room dedicated to Bedrock-based geekery.

NEWS EDITOR
LAUREN MILES
@LAUREN_M1LES

It has been an absolute pleasure to join the *Total Film* team this month as News Editor. I can't wait to bring you previews of the most exciting upcoming films!

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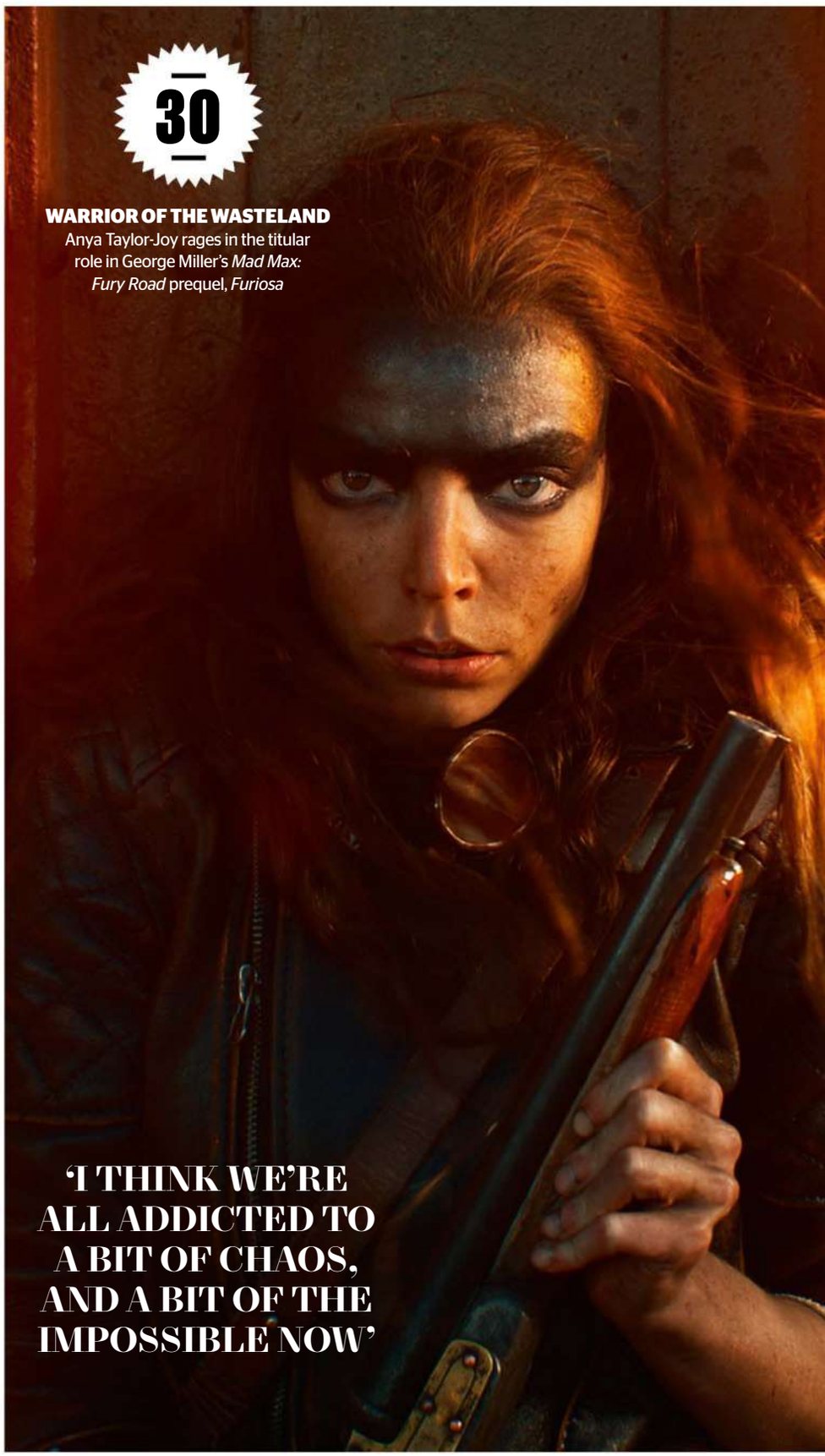

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Anya Taylor-Joy rages in the titular role in George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* prequel, *Furiosa*

**'I THINK WE'RE ALL ADDICTED TO A BIT OF CHAOS, AND A BIT OF THE IMPOSSIBLE NOW'**

SCAN TO GET OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER



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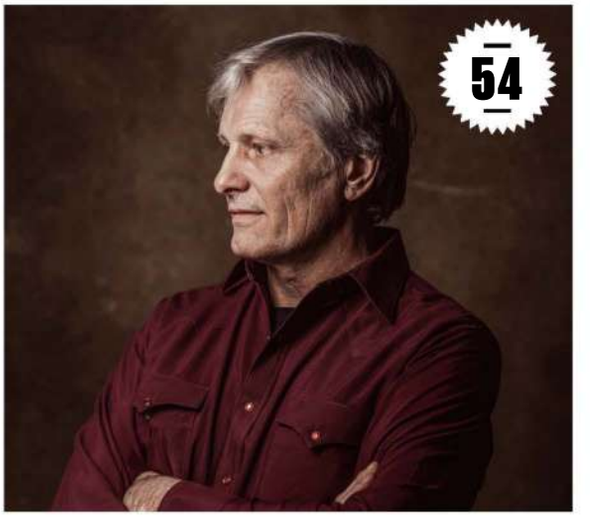

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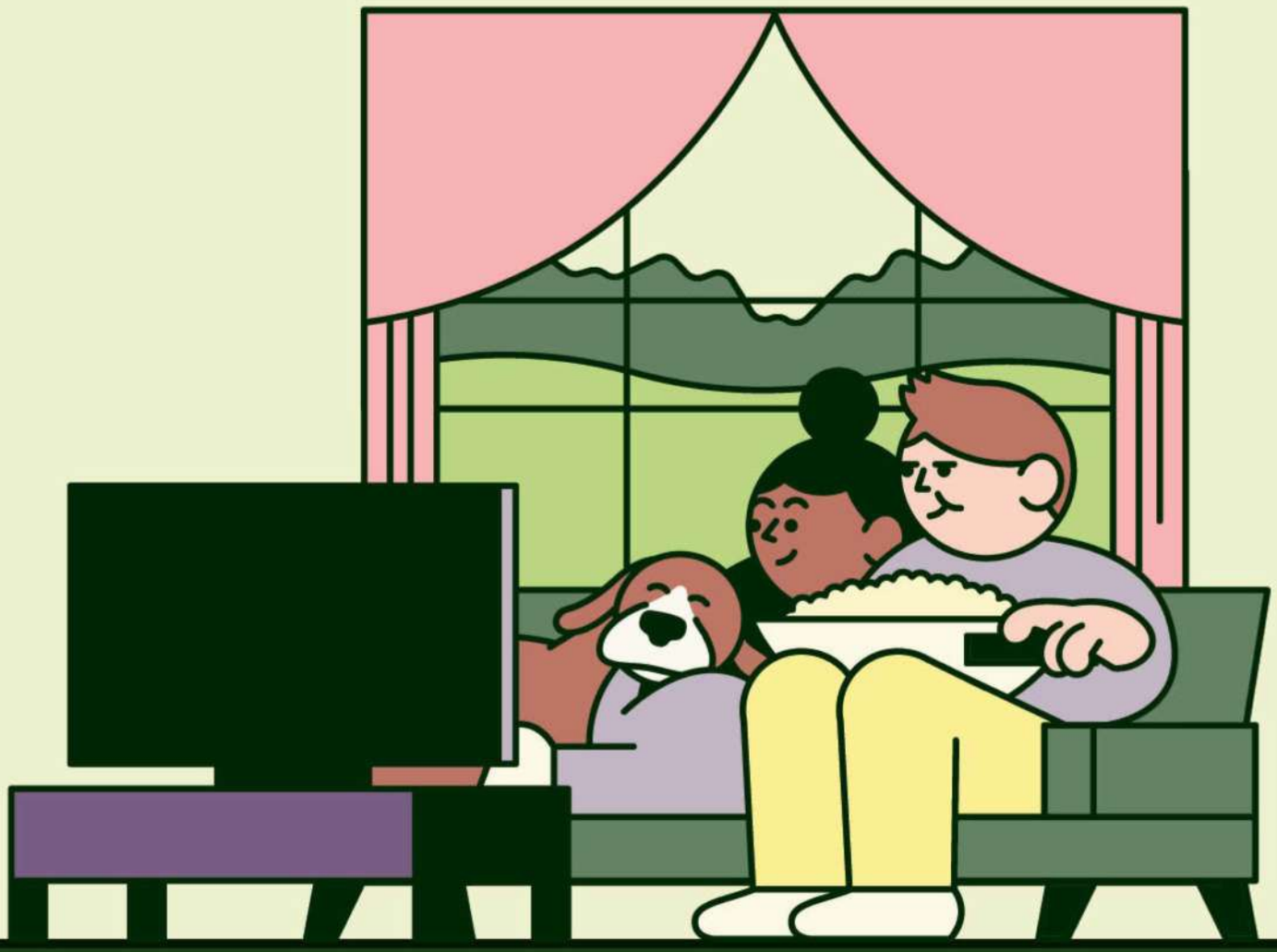

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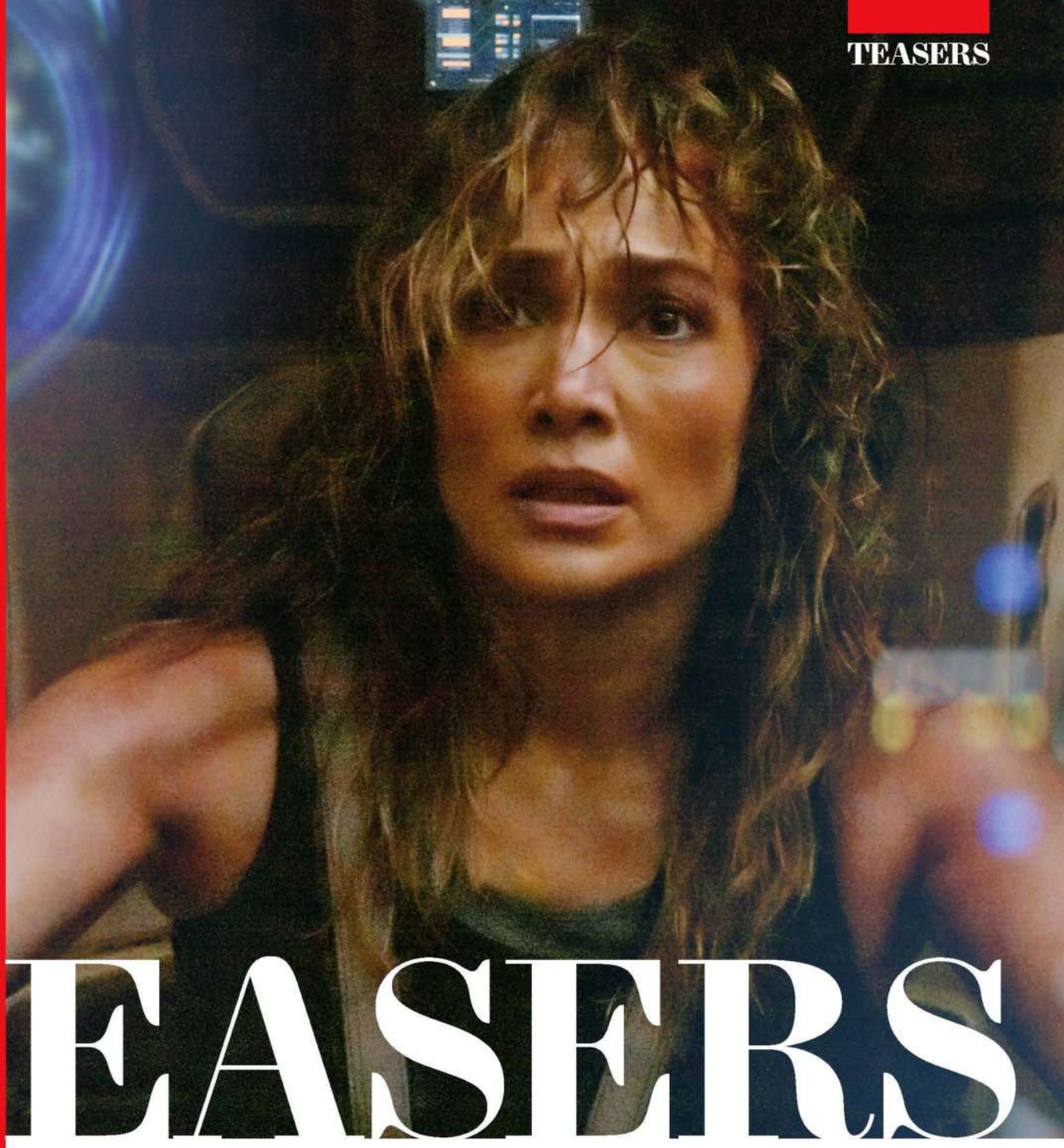


# TEASERS

## FULL METAL JACKET

### **ATLAS** Jennifer Lopez suits up to save us from AI in Brad Peyton's mech-savvy sci-fi...

**We're calling it: "*Castaway* in space, if Wilson talked back",' laughs Canadian filmmaker Brad Peyton. Swap Tom Hanks for Jennifer Lopez and the grubby loincloth for a giant killer robot mech suit, and you'll have some idea of what *Atlas* is shaping up to be.**

'Science-fiction is something I've been passionate about since I was a kid,' says the director, speaking from the edit deck of *Atlas* as he puts the final touches on the film that's been more than five years in the making. 'I'm one of those people that's seen all the Rutger Hauer movies that no one else has seen – I'm that guy. To me, science-fiction is hallowed ground. And because of that, I don't want to retread what's been done well before.'

Handed a script about a rogue robot and the woman who, in trying to stop it, gets stranded in an armoured walker on a remote planet, Peyton found the seed of an idea that felt fresh. 'It was a very rudimentary version of the final film but it had this concept that I loved, which was this woman who doesn't trust artificial intelligence being trapped inside a mech suit, who then has to befriend another AI if she wants to survive.'

Where arguments around the morality of AI all feel very 2023/2024, *Atlas* has been in the works since 2019 – back when ChatGPT and Hollywood writers' strikes hinged around auto-generated scripts were all still science-fiction themselves. 'When I started the movie, what drew me in wasn't so much the AI aspect, it was the character of this woman who didn't trust anyone,' says Peyton, then fresh from Dwayne Johnson's *Rampage* and Netflix's *Daybreak*. 'The conversation that I wanted this film to take part in was technology

Sterling K. Brown as Colonel Banks

being an ever-evolving thing, just like humanity is.'

Into this battlefield comes Jennifer Lopez as agent Atlas Shepherd – crash-landing while tracking a robot gone bad (Simu Liu, channelling the T-1000) and forced to rely on the help of the 'friendly' AI sat-nav built into the military mech suit she has to strap into to survive.

'We're in a Jen-naissance right now,' laughs Peyton, who was instantly sold on the idea of casting Lopez in the lead when her name first came up. 'Jen is known for a lot of things – but she's mostly known for being fearless and being a hard worker, and those are two things that I really latched on to for this role. And I say that because this shoot was very strange. It's not a normal movie. Eight weeks of this was Jennifer by herself, stood on a huge gimbal in the middle of an empty warehouse…'

Exteriors took the production to explosive battlefield sets in New Zealand – and brought in support from the likes of Sterling K. Brown and Mark Strong – but the majority of the film saw Lopez acting alone, strapped into a metal armature surrounded by enough cameras to capture every moment of her solo survival story.

'People are gonna think I'm totally nuts, but what was great about that set-up was that we built the perfect stage for Jennifer to perform in,' says Peyton. 'I had a couple of markers in place – little wires and sticks so she knew where certain buttons were – but once she had the hand movements figured out, I pulled those away. She was thrown by all the cameras at first, but once she got used to it she really embraced the freedom. She didn't have to lock in any eyelines, and she was free to do whatever she wanted. It was an endless stage for creativity. It allowed us to capture what I think is one of the best performances of her career.'

Almost as much a main character, the robo-suit (called an 'Ark' here) needed enough of its own identity to stand out from the sci-fi crowd, as well as looking and feeling like a fully functional mecha that Atlas lives, fights and survives in for almost the entire film.

'My general approach was to look at everything that I could find that already existed,' says Peyton. 'So that was *Avatar*, *Aliens*, [videogame] *Titanfall*, a few other old movies I loved from the 80s – and then to make sure the scale of mine was different. The shape of mine was different. The movement was different. I wanted this to be its own thing.

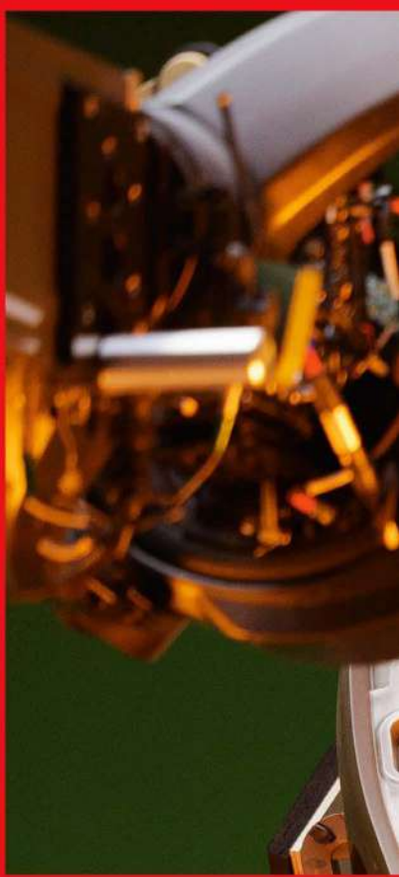
'We started out looking at Virgil Abloh's fashion designs. At the interior for his Mercedes Maybach. When we designed it, we actually started with an F-15 and then thought about the lineage from there, so it had a timeline that was grounded in reality. I think I drove the design team a little crazy!'

Originally hired just to feed lines to Lopez on set, Gregory James Cohan became the final voice of 'Smith', the suit's own AI, becoming the last piece of the odd sort-of-solo mission at the heart of *Atlas*, described as much as a 'funny buddy-cop movie' as a tough-as-nails survival adventure that tackles real-world heartache.

'I think people will go into it thinking, "Yeah, this is a big robot thing with Jennifer Lopez… it'll be fun, whatever", but then they'll come out feeling genuinely emotional, and that's the biggest reward for me,' says Peyton. That, and the working scale model of the Ark suit that's now sitting in his office – a gift from the design team he drove so mad in getting it right. 'It's literally the coolest thing ever…' **PAUL BRADSHAW**

**ATLAS STREAMS ON NETFLIX FROM 24 MAY.**

**'Eight weeks of this was Jennifer by herself, stood on a huge gimbal in the middle of an empty warehouse'**
**BRAD PEYTON**



Jennifer Lopez stars as agent Atlas Shepherd

Director Brad Peyton with Lopez on set

Lopez spent much of the shoot by herself, strapped into a huge robo-suit

Lopez's character has to trust AI in order to take down the rogue AI

# HOT RIGHT NOW

## AARON TAYLOR-JOHNSON IS THE TALK OF THE TOWN.

**I don't necessarily want this to be my brand, doing one action movie after another,' Aaron Taylor-Johnson told *Rolling Stone* at the end of March. He's of course referring to his recent turns in David Leitch movies *Bullet Train* and *The Fall Guy*, and also the upcoming *Kraven the Hunter*. But that assertion is also, possibly, Taylor-Johnson's way of skirting around speculation that has since reached fever pitch – that the actor has been offered the role of James Bond following Daniel Craig's departure in 2021.**

*The Sun* first reported the casting on 18 March, with the publication claiming that 'insiders' had confirmed that the actor would sign a contract that very week. The fact that no one attached to the franchise (or close to Taylor-Johnson) has been willing to confirm or deny the report means that it's still merely a rumour at the time of going to press.

Either way, the 33-year-old's profile has certainly been raised by the persistent speculation. He'd be a great choice for the part, proving during his career that he's a charismatic leading man, a skilled dramatic actor and a bit of an action star, too.

Playing John Lennon in *Nowhere Boy* was his breakout role, but before then he'd already starred alongside Hollywood heavyweights - one of them being Jackie Chan in *Shanghai Knights*. It seems he learned a lot from watching them, with his leading role as Dave Lizewski in the irreverent superhero comedy *Kick-Ass* catapulting him into the mainstream.

For much of his career, he's kept a relatively low profile, but so far the 2020s seem to be his decade. Playing sweary assassin Tangerine in *Bullet Train*, Taylor-Johnson proved he can hold his own against the likes of Brad Pitt. *Kraven the Hunter* places him back in a leading role and back into franchise filmmaking for the first time since playing Pietro Maximoff in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. With all the skills and experience to play Bond in his arsenal, it's no wonder Taylor-Johnson remains the front runner in this particular race. **LAUREN MILES**

**KRAVEN THE HUNTER OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 30 AUGUST.**

GETTY



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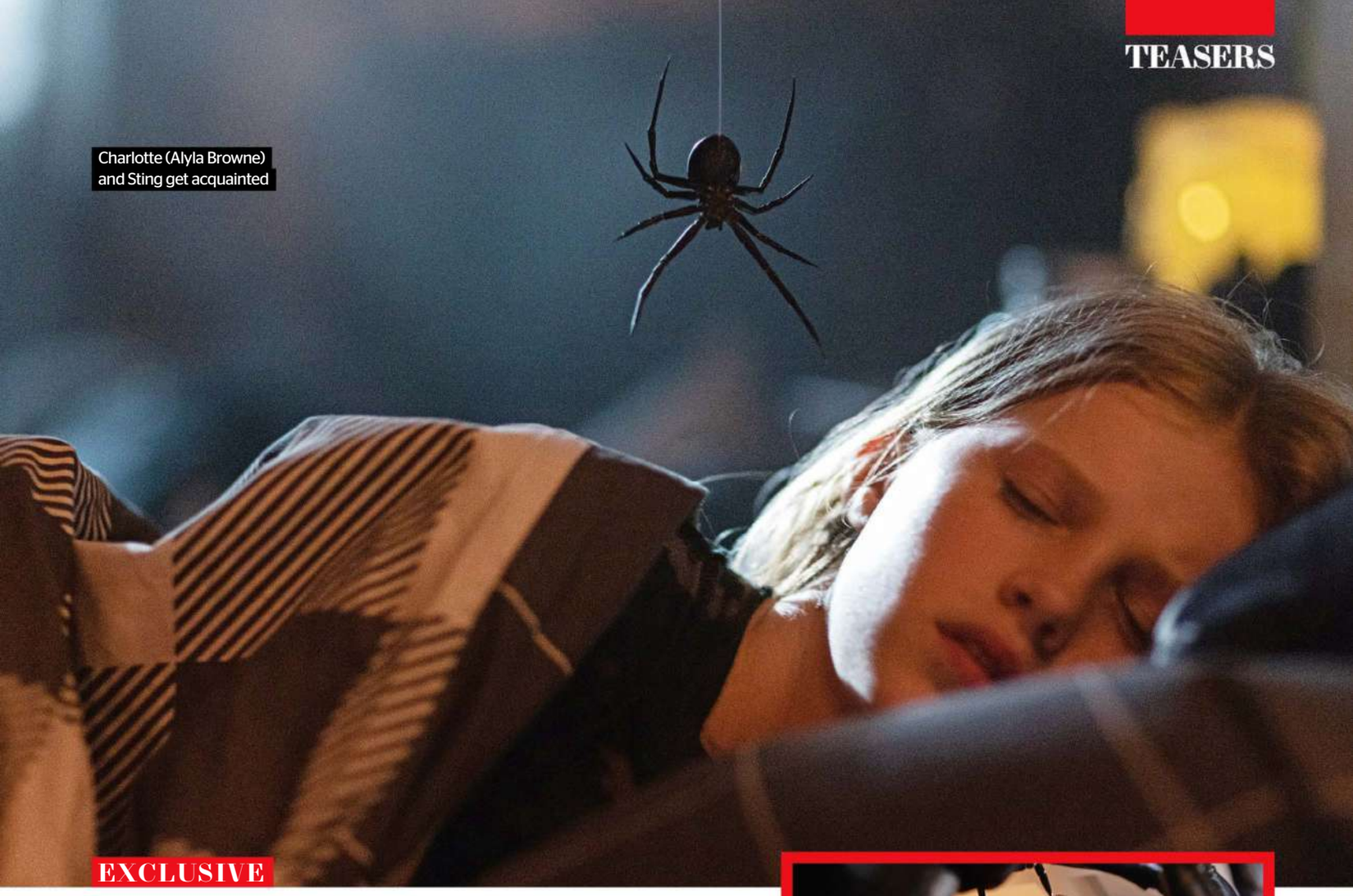

Charlotte (Alyla Browne) and Sting get acquainted

EXCLUSIVE

# SPIDEY TENSE

## **STING** A big-ass spider feeds on everyone in an apartment block? It's no laughing matter...

**When Kiah Roache-Turner was a toddler, he was bitten in a sandpit by a big, black spider. An arachnophobe since, the Australian filmmaker's endured many terrifying encounters with 'spiders the size of a hand', but one confrontation was especially scarring.**

The creature grows rapidly, as Charlotte's stepdad Ethan (Ryan Corr) discovers

'I used to work in an office, doing editing. I went to get a lens out of the cupboard and a huntsman fell on my face. I tore my shirt off and just screamed and screamed. Everybody was just looking at me. I was like, "A spider, a spider!" My mate Nevin is like, "Where?" I couldn't find it. I'm just standing there with my shirt off. This fucking spider made me look like a dickhead.'

Cut to 40 years later and Roache-Turner, director of the crazed Wyrmwood movies (think Mad Max fights zombies), is standing in James Wan's office being told, 'The trick to a good horror film [is] "single location, one family, one monster",' he recalls. And so he imagined a 12-year-old girl, Charlotte (Alyla Browne), making a pet of a small spider she names Sting, only for it to grow exponentially and escape into the air-conditioning ducts. Soon the pets in the apartment block start to go missing. And then the residents...

'It's my worst nightmare,' grins Roache-Turner, who's looking to move from 'rip-roaring action-horror' into 'horror-horror', saying, 'I want to scare the pants off people.' Starting with his actors. 'I was so glad I was able to work with [visual effects supremo] Richard Taylor – he's a god – and that Weta were able to build me a practical creature. There's nothing more gratifying than to shove a 100lb spider in an actor's face, and watch them actually scream for real.'

While some wide shots use VFX to show the giant spider scuttling across ceilings and walls, mostly it's Taylor's creature that's stalking and devouring. *Sting* is no *Eight Legged Freaks*-style comedy. It has an R-rating for 'violent content, bloody images and language'. 'That sounds like my year-seven school report,' he laughs, before turning serious. 'Any horror filmmaker who makes a film PG should be shot for cowardice. Horror is an R-rated medium. It was important to have a scene where a spider crawls up a woman's face, into her mouth and into her stomach.'

**'There's nothing more gratifying than shoving a 100lb spider in an actor's face'** KIAH ROACHE-TURNER

Quite. But you also need characters you care about. 'I'm basically [Charlotte's stepdad] Ethan [Ryan Corr], but instead of a filmmaker, he's a comic-book artist,' he explains. 'I have a stepdaughter. So it's all very personal. The arc that I wanted was where a stepfather gets to the end and says, "I love you," and she says, "I love you," back. In the movie, it takes 96 minutes. In my life, it took years until it happened – and it was a wonderful moment.' **JAMIE GRAHAM**

**STING OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 31 MAY.**

STUDIOCANAL

Award-winning drag queen Jinkx Monsoon will play a villain in the new series

EXCLUSIVE

# WHAT'S UP, DOC?

## DOCTOR WHO Russell T. Davies, Ncuti Gatwa and Millie Gibson open up...

**In 2023, *Doctor Who* capped its 60th-anniversary celebrations by kicking 10th/14th Doctor David Tennant out of the TARDIS. Now, after battling goblins in Christmas special *The Church on Ruby Road*, it's time for Doc 15 Ncuti Gatwa (*Sex Education*) and Millie Gibson – co-traveller Ruby Sunday – to take over. Their first season honours *Doctor Who*'s past by embracing the show's self-regenerating drive, as the duo rocket from space stations to 60s London between opening two episodes *Space Babies* and *The Devil's Chord* alone. But what secrets do their pasts hold as they time travel on? *Teasers* speaks to Gatwa, Gibson and showrunner Russell T. Davies about new beginnings...**

**The Doctor and Ruby had an adventure at Christmas but it was so swift, they hardly got to know each other...**

**MILLIE GIBSON** I didn't even clock that we hadn't got to know one another, we had such a whirlwind with the goblins. *Space Babies* is where we start to care and know about one another's past and get close.

**NCUTI GATWA** It's an exercise of trust that we go on a trip together. It feels like we've known each other for multiple lifetimes in *Space Babies*, like they're similar lost children – and then they start to learn about each other.

**The chemistry felt immediate in *The Church on Ruby Road*. Was it in the chemistry read?**

**RUSSELL T. DAVIES** You could just stand back while they read the scene and watch sparks fly. And it's been that way ever since.

**NG** When Millie walked into the room, I instantly thought, 'That's Ruby.' We were all so charmed and the chemistry started bouncing off each other. We're lucky to work with her.

**RTD** The truth is, sometimes you put two brilliant people together and they'll be brilliant.

**Ncuti, there was an eagerness to how your Doctor took charge of the TARDIS last year. Is that crucial to a role with so many previous incumbents?**

**NG** We've never had a situation like that, with the 'bigeneration' [the Doctor splits in two]. My Doctor's born raring to go. He's created another TARDIS, so he's like, 'I'm off to save the universe and have some fun.' I don't know that it's an eagerness to take ownership but that situation brings a certain energy out of you. Led by Russell's writing, my Doctor has a lot of energy and eagerness to get cracking.

**RTD** The amount we talk about previous Doctors on set is zero. They're wonderful people but *Doctor Who* exists in the present and future. There's a roster of wonderful companions behind us, too... *Doctor Who* has moments where it looks back but it's more exciting to look forward.

**Millie, what is the companion's importance for you?**

**MG** It's weird to think Ruby's going to be the first companion to many new fans around the world, because we've had so many actors that have fulfilled that role with passion and love. It's crazy that I'm so young as well. But I think that level of innocence is something young fans might connect with.

**What can you tease about Ruby's arc?**

**MG** It's an absolute roller coaster. She discovers something new about herself every episode...

**RTD** A big thread is the mystery of Ruby's past. We also think about the Doctor's past, which is mysterious in itself. The Doctor talks about his family, things we've never heard before, things that haven't been discussed for decades. There are discoveries coming. They're exploring their pasts and it's all heading towards a huge finale where all these things connect.

***The Church on Ruby Road* seemed laden with series clues: Mrs. Flood, Ruby's parentage, the 33 babies...**

**RTD** Some of them are red herrings but a lot pay off. In the first episode, the Doctor and Ruby visit a space station crewed by babies, whose presence makes them tune in. It's like they're being followed by babies. Why? Is something being said about what's ahead?

BBC



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The 15th Doctor enjoys a 'banging' wardrobe

Ncuti Gatwa and Millie Gibson play the Doctor and his companion Ruby Sunday

The pair's adventures are sure to be fun - but perilous, too

**Your Doctor seems emotionally open, Ncuti. Is that a characteristic that's explored in the series?**

**NG** Well, he has two hearts. He's got a lot of emotion in him, a lot of joy, he feels double. He's spent centuries travelling alone through time and space, losing companions here, there and everywhere. There's a lot of weight in there, a lot of pain. Because he's 'bigenerated', there's theories that the 15th is in his healed era. I don't know that I would agree because he's another Doctor in the line and he has memories – it's continuous. But he's unafraid to show his emotions. I think he knows his vulnerability is a strength.

**'He's unafraid to show his emotions. I think he knows his vulnerability is a strength'**
**NCUTI GATWA**

**Unafraid to dress sharply, too. Does your Doctor's changing costume reflect his personality?**

**NG** This man can go to any planet in the universe and any period… His wardrobe will be banging. When I got the role I thought, 'This character is an iconic British institution. How interesting would it be to explore the subcultures and fashions of Britain and have that reflected in his personality?' We can explore Britain sartorially.

**People talk about the pressures of the role. Is it also a huge joy to work and play in this sandbox?**

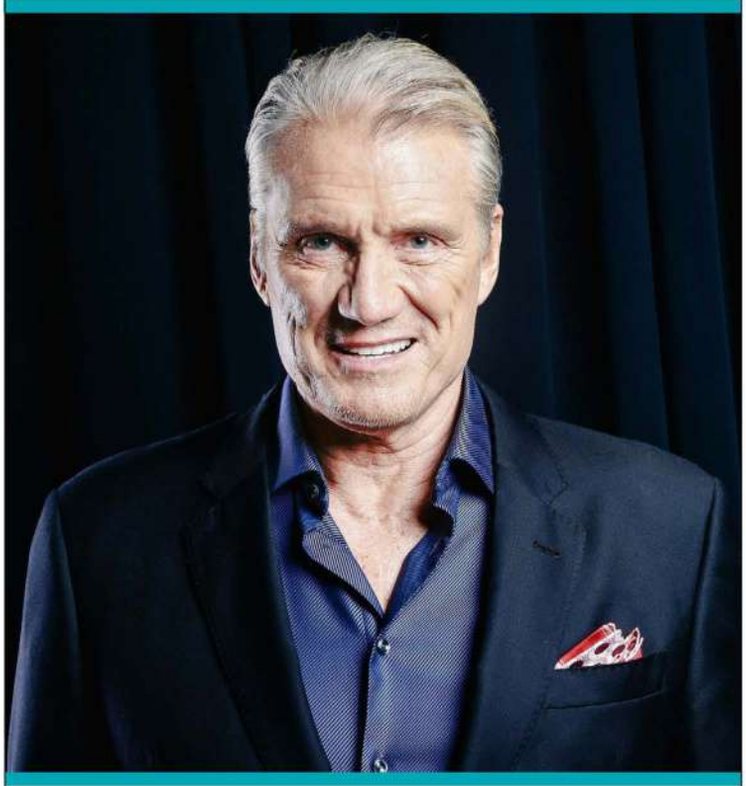
**NG** Definitely – the pressure and the joy exist in equal measure. The things that are worthwhile in life aren't always plain sailing. Some of the most fulfilling things can be hard. But it is a joy. This is a show that's brought joy to people for a reason, because joy runs through it. It's a beautiful story and it's an honour to be in. In each episode, I go to different places and have a different set of challenges. The amount of things we get to do – it's *wild*. That's a job you want, isn't it?

**KEVIN HARLEY**

**DOCTOR WHO IS ON BBC iPLAYER AND BBC1 FROM 11 MAY.**

# YOU TALKIN' TO ME?

## FILM QUOTES POSE AS QUESTIONS. FILM STARS TRY TO COPE.



## IN THE CROSSHAIRS THIS MONTH... DOLPH LUNDGREN

**You talkin' to me?**
I am. I'm talking to you from my apartment in West Hollywood, up here on the 27th floor.

**Why don't you tell me the story of your life?**
It's a long story! There's going to be a documentary about it called *Fights Worth Fighting*. That's starting out in Sweden, my career in chemical engineering, studying martial arts, the movies, my dad, my trauma, getting back onto the big screen with *The Expendables* and *Aquaman*... And then my medical adventure with kidney cancer. I've had a pretty interesting life, I would say.

**You've got to ask yourself one question: 'Do I feel lucky?' Well, do ya, punk?**
I had a prognosis [in 2015] that I only had a couple of years left, so I feel lucky to be alive. Luck has always played a part, though. It's like one of the Roman generals said, 'Everything that happens to you has been decided since the beginning of time.' Everybody has their fate. And my fate was to be somebody who entertains and inspires people, I hope.

**Aren't you a little short for a stormtrooper?**
No, I think I'm about the right size for a stormtrooper!

**Have you ever danced with the devil in the pale moonlight?**
Oh, yeah, many times. I went through a period of heavy drinking and a few addictions while trying to deal with the trauma from my childhood and I think I danced with the devil a few times. But I lived to tell about it.

**Do you have an off switch?**
I do. But I didn't used to. The off switch would be to get drunk. But now I like to hit the couch at least once a day. I like watching historical dramas. I was directing, writing and starring in my latest movie, *Wanted Man*, which is a lot, but my wife keeps me balanced.

**How much can you know about yourself if you've never been in a fight?**
A lot of smart people think they know a lot about themselves. But they don't know about physical courage. You learn a lot about yourself in a fight.

**What's your favourite scary movie?**
I don't scare that easily. It has to be really good for me to stop analysing what I'm seeing and get into it, so I would say my favourite is the original *Exorcist*. Those in-camera effects were way more powerful than anything that came later.

**Why do you do it? Why get up? Why keep fighting?**
Because the alternative is to lay back and die. We're supposed to take on the challenge of life. That's part of the deal. We're supposed to be fighting and trying to make the best of the situation. That's where you find your happiness and meaning.

Latest film *Wanted Man*, in which Lundgren directs, writes and stars

**Magic Mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?**
Not me any more! My wife is the fairest. And my little cat son, Bello. When I was starting out, I wanted to be Clint Eastwood. I liked the grittiness of his characters, and the fact that he wasn't afraid to show his age and his vulnerability, and also the fact that he became a great director after once being considered just a dumb cowboy.

**I suppose you think you're brave, don't you?**
I think I'm fairly brave. I mean, I'm not stupid brave, but I'd stand up for my family if I had to. I sometimes think that if I'd have lived a couple of hundred years ago I probably would have been dead by this age already. I would have died in battle somewhere, doing something heroic, trying to save somebody.

**Are you one of those single-tear people?**
Oh, yes. I cry in movies. And sometimes when I prepare for a role, too. It doesn't mean I have to cry on screen, but I like the release. When I first started acting I was quite emotional. And then through therapy I learned that I had a lot of bottled-up feelings. Crying was a good way to give them up.

**Drago, how does it feel to spar with the great former champion?**
Well, it felt good to spar with Stallone! That's a relationship that has been very special to me over the years. We're friends. Our daughters are friends. When I did an interview about my medical condition last year I got a call from him and he'd been crying. It was a beautiful moment. We've come a long way since punching each other's lights out...

**PAUL BRADSHAW**

**WANTED MAN IS AVAILABLE ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS NOW.**

ALAMY, GETTY, SIGNATURE ENTERTAINMENT

QUESTIONS TAKEN FROM: TAXI DRIVER, WHEN HARRY MET SALLY..., DIRTY HARRY, STAR WARS: EPISODE IV - A NEW HOPE, BATMAN, DEADPOOL, FIGHT CLUB, SCREAM, THE MATRIX REVOLUTIONS, SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS, THE PRINCESS BRIDE, WHIPLASH, ROCKY IV



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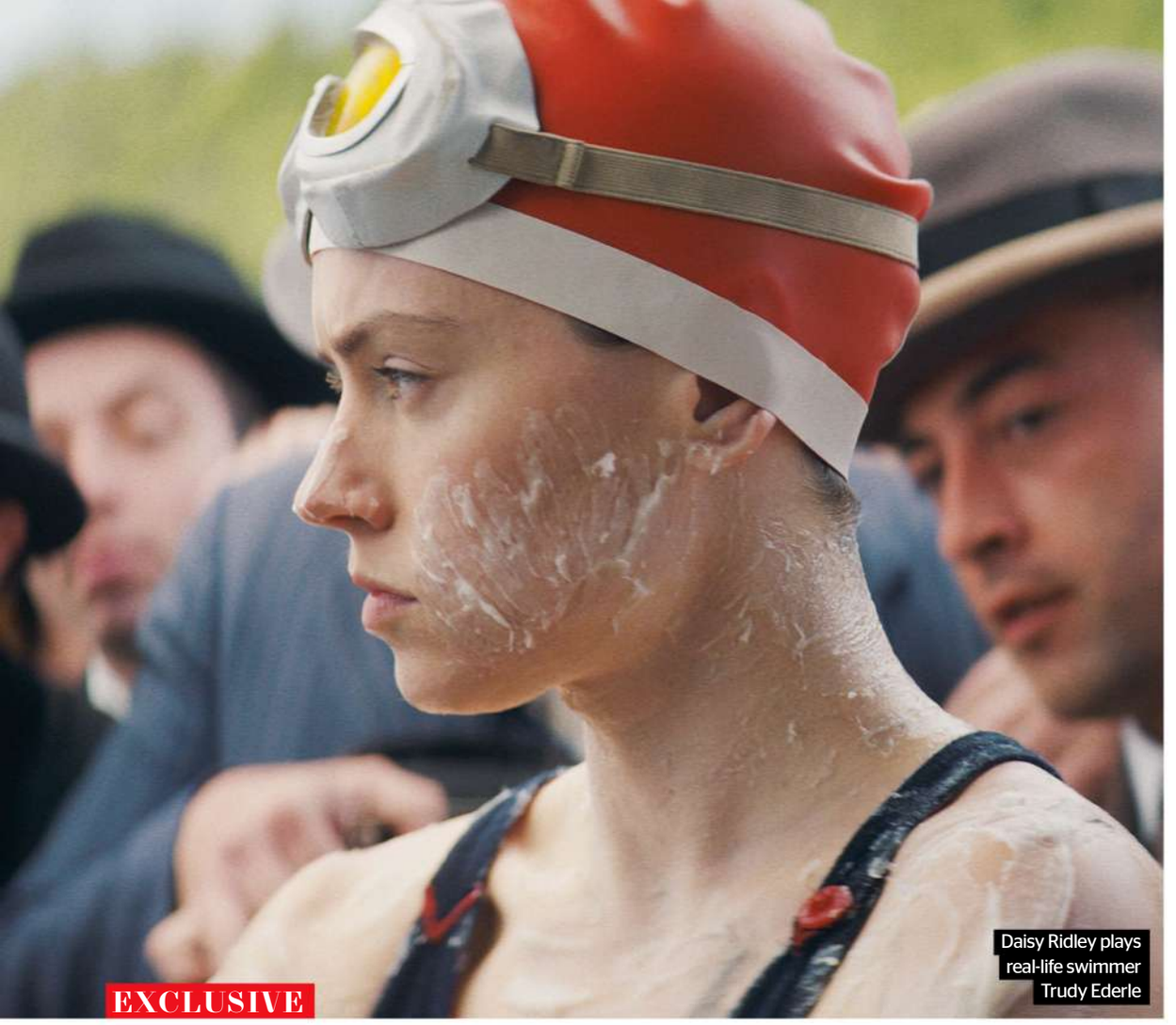

Daisy Ridley plays real-life swimmer Trudy Ederle

EXCLUSIVE

# TRUE GRIT

## YOUNG WOMAN AND THE SEA Daisy Ridley (swim)suits up to play a real-life trailblazer.

**Back in 1926, Gertrude 'Trudy' Ederle became the first woman to swim the English Channel, arriving home to a New York ticker-tape parade. If you've never heard of her, don't feel too bad – neither had Joachim Rønning, the filmmaker bringing Ederle's extraordinary life to the screen.**

'I was just floored by Trudy's story,' says Rønning, who was introduced to her achievements by screenwriter Jeff Nathanson while the pair were in production on 2017's *Pirates of the Caribbean: Salazar's Revenge*. 'I love true stories like this, which is about the triumph of the human spirit.'

Surviving a near-lethal bout of measles as a young girl, Ederle defied gendered expectations of the period to become 'Queen of the Waves' – a gold-medal-winning, world-record-breaking swimmer, all before she was 20. But her greatest sporting achievement was the 35-mile swim from Cap Gris-Nez to Kingsdown beach in Kent.

Casting Ridley for 'her talent as an actor, but also her stamina', Rønning was resolved to shoot the centrepiece swim in-camera, with the Black Sea doubling for the English Channel. 'I didn't want it to be in a tank, or against a green screen,' Rønning states. 'It was very important for me to do it as real as possible. I think you can really feel it.'

This consideration also extended to Ridley, who spent 'weeks and weeks' in the sea to film the crossing. 'Daisy's swimming in 15 or 16° Celsius water on a daily basis, and never complaining,' Rønning recalls. 'I had to drag her out when she was hypothermic!'

For Rønning, currently in production on *Tron: Ares*, the film marks a return to the verisimilitude of his 2012 water-based breakthrough, *Kon-Tiki*. 'I have two careers,' Rønning notes. 'I'm making these big tent-pole movies, which are very effects-driven. And this is kind of a reaction to that. I want to go out and get the water sprayed in my face, just to feel alive.' **JORDAN FARLEY**

**YOUNG WOMAN AND THE SEA OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 31 MAY.**

DISNEY, GETTY

Q&A

## Daisy Ridley

**How did you feel about shooting the swimming scenes for real?**
Before we were about to go, I told everyone, 'Just so you guys know, I am quite fearful of open water.' I think they thought I was joking. So it was *really* intense. After the fact, I thought: 'I actually cannot believe I did that.' And I certainly have not done it since. No more swimming, thank you.

**Did diving in with both feet help you temporarily overcome that fear?**
I was actually talking to my GP when I went for a medical last year, because I was about to start [shooting] *Cleaner*. I've also developed a fear of heights, and that film is about someone hanging onto the side of the building. I was like, 'What's wrong with me?' But it does become a sort of sick overcoming of something.

**It's as much a family story as it is a real-life underdog story...**
Yeah. To me, it always felt like: this is a story about someone who swam the Channel, who defied expectations, and a group of people who rallied around her. Who knows, really, how she did it – by sheer will or sheer grit. But my feeling was that I wanted Trudy to succeed because her family was there. **JF**

The film follows a Syrian family's desperate attempt to get to Europe

EXCLUSIVE

# NO ESCAPE

## GREEN BORDER Agnieszka Holland tackles the refugee crisis in this searing drama...

**'I think the refugees issue – and migrants in general – is one of the biggest issues and challenges for the future of Europe and probably for the world,' says Agnieszka Holland (*Mr Jones, Europa Europa*). This comes after the 75-year-old Polish director has delivered her most controversial film in years, *Green Border* – a gruelling black-and-white drama that follows a Syrian family as they attempt to cross between Belarus and Poland. To say it hasn't gone down well in certain parts of Poland is an understatement.**

'I was expecting the worst,' Holland admits. 'But I wasn't expecting [the backlash] to be led directly and personally by the highest politicians.' Before the recent Polish elections, justice minister Zbigniew Ziobro, of the Catholic nationalist Sovereign Poland party, compared it to a Nazi Germany propaganda film 'showing Poles as bandits and murderers'. Meanwhile, President Andrzej Duda also criticised the film as being 'anti-Polish'.

'It was a very heated time,' Holland tells *Teasers*, speaking over Zoom. 'I started to receive a lot of death threats.' She began to take security guards with her as she criss-crossed the country promoting the film. 'It was a new experience for me, to be afraid on the streets,' she adds.

Thankfully, though, there has also been a positive response ever since *Green Border* won the Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival last year. 'Overall, the film has been a wonderful experience,' Holland states.

With the script scrupulously researched, the director spoke to journalists, activists, refugees and even border guards who were 'traumatised by the tasks they had to execute' – beating migrants and treating them appallingly. When it came to filming, Holland used professional actors, although some had experiences of the crisis. 'They've been very motivated, they wanted to do it… they had the chance to give a voice to the voiceless and to give faces to the faceless.'

**'I started to receive a lot of death threats'**
**AGNIESZKA HOLLAND**

The movie has been painted as 'anti-Polish' by government officials

Although Holland understands the 'fear' that causes concern over refugees, she wants audiences to see the perspective of those crossing into the EU. 'They don't care who helps them to pass the borders. If it's the smugglers or whoever, they just want to reach a safe place and have a life with dignity. It's the only aim they have.'

While Holland is now shooting her new film, about the life of Czech author Franz Kafka, it's intriguing to ask what gives the director her courage to keep making films like *Green Border*. 'I don't know,' she shrugs. 'I think you are just born like that! I really believe that the activist becomes the hero of our times. I'm very disappointed by the political class. The political class lost courage. But democracy doesn't give the tools any more to stand for what you believe in.' **JAMES MOTTRAM**

**GREEN BORDER OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 21 JUNE.**

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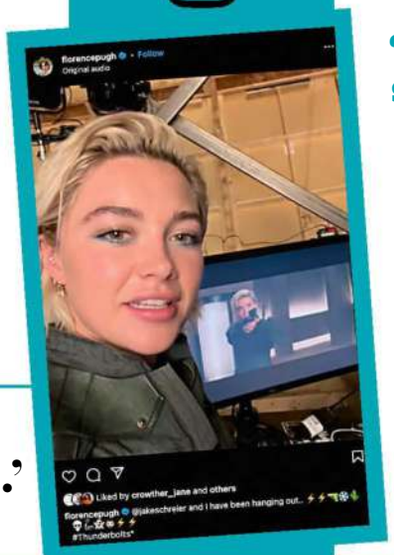
## ‘SOUNDS LIKE A F***ING NIGHTMARE.’

**KRISTEN STEWART** HAS NO INTENTION OF APPEARING IN THE MCU.




**‘That scene surfing the sandworms is one of the greatest things I have ever seen. Ever!’**

**STEVEN SPIELBERG** IS A BIG FAN OF *DUNE: PART TWO*.

# SOUND BYTES

The month in dialogue and digits.

## $718,750

THE AMOUNT THE *TITANIC* DOOR THAT SAVED **KATE WINSLET** SOLD FOR AT AN AUCTION OF ICONIC HOLLYWOOD PROPS.

## 50M

THE NUMBER OF VIEWS **DOUG LIMAN’S** *ROAD HOUSE* REMAKE HAD OVER ITS FIRST TWO WEEKENDS ON PRIME VIDEO.

## ‘IF I WAS OLIVER COLMAN, I’D BE EARNING A F*** OF A LOT MORE THAN I AM.’

**OLIVIA COLMAN** HAS SOME CHOICE WORDS TO SAY ABOUT HOLLYWOOD’S GENDER PAY GAP.

**COP’ A LOAD**

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA’S *MEGALOPOLIS* HAS FINALLY SCREENED FOR DISTRIBUTORS FOR THE FIRST TIME.

**GOOD THING**

**BAD THING**

**RIP**

LOUIS GOSSETT JR., WHO WON A BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR OSCAR FOR *AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN*, PASSED AWAY AGED 87.

## ‘EVEN THEY COULDN’T QUITE EXPLAIN IT.’

OVER TWO YEARS LATER, **MICHAEL KEATON** STILL DOESN’T KNOW WHY HE WAS IN *MORBIUS*.

## ‘EMASCULATING... TO A CERTAIN EXTENT.’

SINGER **SHAKIRA** REVEALS HOW SHE AND HER SONS FELT ABOUT GRETA GERWIG’S *BARBIE*.

GETTY



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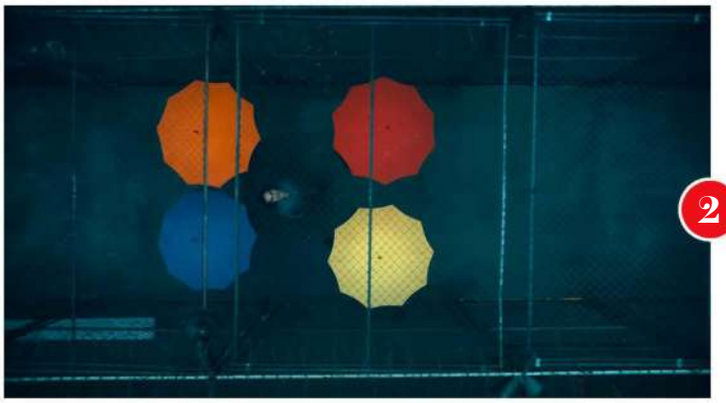
TRAILER BREAKDOWN

# FACE THE MUSIC

## JOKER: FOLIE À DEUX Phoenix and Gaga perform a diabolical duet.

Following the events of 2019's *Joker*, Arthur Fleck (Joaquin Phoenix) is incarcerated in the famed Arkham Asylum. It might look drab in Arthur's cell, but the guard's wake-up call of 'It's showtime!' hints at the musical aspects of Todd Phillips' sequel that are yet to be fully revealed.



At CinemaCon, Phillips said music is 'an essential element', stopping short of calling the film a musical. The trailer certainly has some whimsical features that seem musical-inspired, like the guards' colourful umbrellas. 'We use music to make us whole,' Arthur says in the voiceover.

But Arthur isn't alone any more. Lady Gaga's Harley Quinn features in the trailer, and from the looks of it she's a patient, not a doctor as she is in the comics. But, as is usual for the pair, they're inexplicably drawn to one another. 'We cast Gaga because she's magic,' says Phillips.

'Let's get out of here,' Harley says as the duo escape to Arkham's roof (with Arkham Hotel written in neon lights) for a romantic dance in the moonlight. It then cuts to them strutting outside: could some of the movie's musical-influenced moments be dream sequences?

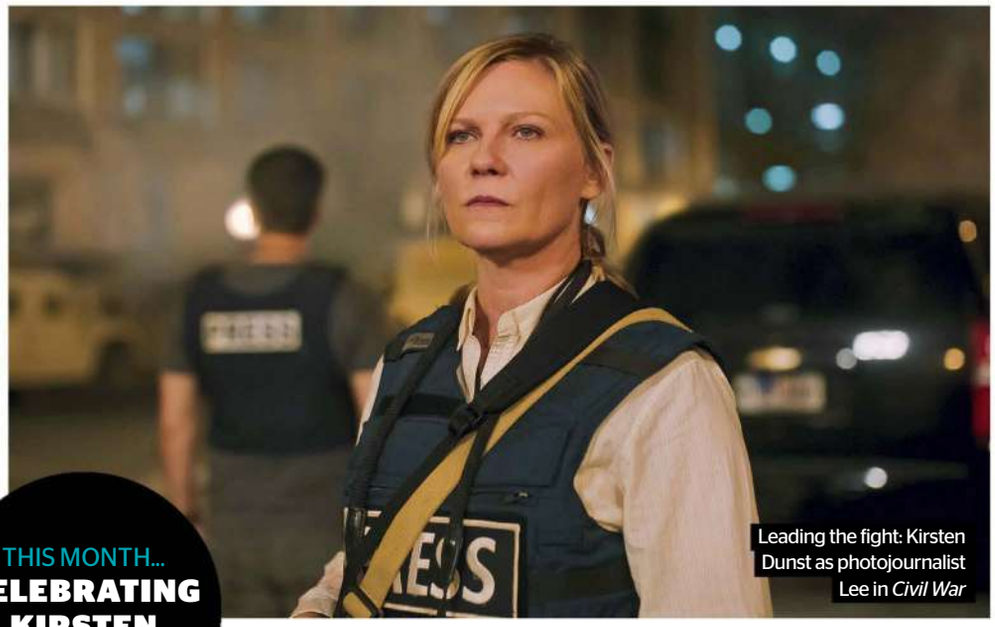
One thing remains the same for Gaga's Harley: her relationship with the Joker is transformative. Towards the end of the trailer, she is seen painting on her own clown make-up – and, like Arthur's, it's suitably messy. This promises to be the tale of them becoming partners in crime.

'I want to see the real you,' Harley says, painting a smile on the glass as she visits Arthur in prison. He grins, the smile lining up perfectly with his own. The film will surely see them bring out the worst in each other. 'It doesn't veer too far from the first film,' promises Phillips. **LAUREN MILES**

**JOKER: FOLIE À DEUX OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 4 OCTOBER.**

WARNER BROS. PICTURES

# Contributing editor **LEILA LATIF** has something to say...



Leading the fight: Kirsten Dunst as photojournalist Lee in *Civil War*

THIS MONTH...
**CELEBRATING KIRSTEN DUNST**

**In 2017, the #MeToo movement in Hollywood was supposed to change everything. Harvey Weinstein was gone, women were demanding pay parity with their male co-stars, and female filmmakers were asked about their art, not just their outfits. In 2018, Natalie Portman confidently called out the institutionalised sexism of the industry when presenting the Best Director Golden Globe with a pointed 'Congratulations to the all-male nominees'. We could all rest! We'd fixed it! Hence why we presently live in a feminist Utopia. The end.**

If only. The optimism of that era seems naive in hindsight. Yes, there have been positive strides forward – the success of recent audacious feminist films from Greta Gerwig, Raine Allen-Miller, Rose Glass, Greta Lee, Alice Diop and Justine Triet, to name but a few, is a true inspiration – but the needle's still got a long way to go.

For me, few glimmers of hope are as bright as the existence of Kirsten Dunst. A star since childhood, she's done it all: huge superhero franchises, artful depictions of depression from problematic Danish auteurs, pastel-hued biopics of French monarchs... And now she's returning to cinemas as a steely photojournalist in Alex Garland's *Civil War*. Unlike many of the most vocal proponents of #MeToo – coughPortmancough – her filmography features plenty of movies directed by women. Speaking at a round table with fellow actors lamenting that there are 'no female directors', she seemed puzzled and replied, 'I've worked with so many female directors.' Dunst has collaborated with Sofia Coppola (three times), the Mulleavy sisters, Gillian Armstrong and Leslye Headland. Her last project before *Civil War* was 2021's *The Power of the Dog*, which saw Jane Campion win Best Director at both the Golden Globes and the Oscars.

Despite having a career that would be most actors' wildest dream and a commitment to female allyship that extends beyond performative gestures, Dunst is not immune to the patriarchal smog that hangs heavy across her industry, where so many talented women are put out to pasture when they hit 40. She commented recently that after her Oscar-nominated role in *The Power of the Dog* – aside from *Civil War* – she was only offered 'Sad Moms'. She attended this year's Oscars alongside her husband, the wonderfully talented Jesse Plemons, who since *The Power of the Dog* has starred in three films, including Scorsese's *Killers of the Flower Moon*. On stage, Ryan Gosling sang *I'm Just Ken* before an enraptured audience with his partner, Eva Mendes, absent, having retired a decade prior, when she turned 40, because she 'got tired fighting for the good roles'. The contrast between what Hollywood offered the women vs the men in these partnerships is stark, but the actual numbers are even more depressing: in Dr Martha M. Lauzen's 2023 *Celluloid Ceiling* study of the top 100 grossing films of the year, 32 films were led by men over 40, while women over 40 had... three.

In *Civil War*, not only does Dunst showcase yet another side of her considerable range but, as the true feminist icon she is, she extended her support to her up-and-coming co-star Cailee Spaeny. And not only on set – she recommended Spaeny to Sofia Coppola for the *Priscilla* title role.

It's not 2017 any more. Dismantling the patriarchy using memes and a hashtag was wishful thinking. But if Hollywood can change, it will come down to the sustained work, talent and allyship of women like Dunst. Whether it's in Alex Garland's cruel dystopia or the real world's slightly less cruel one, we must protect her at all costs.

**LEILA WILL BE BACK NEXT ISSUE. FOR FURTHER MUSINGS AND MISSIVES FOLLOW @ LEILA_LATIF ON X/TWITTER.**

THE L WORD

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Hirsutes you, sir: the Zellners' absurdist comedy captures a year in the life of the legendary Bigfoot

EXCLUSIVE

# ANIMAL KINGDOM

## SASQUATCH SUNSET The Zellner Brothers go ape with this myth-busting marvel...

**It was incredibly difficult. It took years. But it's what we signed up for,' says David Zellner, talking about the torturous gestation of *Sasquatch Sunset*, the latest surreal slice of absurdism that he co-directs with brother Nathan. And no wonder: a year in the life of a Sasquatch family, with four actors all in hairy ape costumes grunting, groaning and behaving like beasts in the wild; it's utterly unique. No dialogue, no human characters – just pure animal magnetism.**

'We've been fascinated with the mythology of Bigfoot since we were kids,' says David, last seen subverting the western with 2018 Robert Pattinson-starrer *Damsel*. 'Primates in general, we've always been obsessed with – whether it was *2001* or *Planet of the Apes*, or Koko the Gorilla. And a lot of National Geographic documentaries. When we decided to put together a feature, it wasn't like we suddenly did a bunch of research; it was an accumulation of a lifelong interest.'

Back in 2010, they made the four-minute short *Sasquatch Birth Journal 2*, featuring Nathan as the titular creature. Now he's back as one of this hirsute quartet. 'It was something that you don't get to do that often. Just totally disappear into the make-up and into that character,' says Nathan. Joining him are Jesse Eisenberg, Riley Keough and Christophe Zajac-Denek, who steer the story across four seasons, as the Sasquatch family face innumerable dangers out in the wild.

With Eisenberg on board as a producer, he even part-funded the film.

**'We've been fascinated with the mythology of Bigfoot since we were kids'**
**DAVID ZELLNER**

Creature feature: the film has neither dialogue nor human characters

'He was essential in getting it going. We couldn't have done it without him in that regard,' tributes David. The actor was also vital during the rehearsal period, bringing on a movement coach that he'd worked with on 2020 film *Resistance*, when he played mime artist Marcel Marceau. 'We wanted to make sure the four of us were all, at least on a baseline, moving the same, speaking to each other in a similar way, so that we looked like the same species,' notes Nathan. Some really took it to the max, adds David. 'I mean, a testament to Riley's fearlessness… one of the first things she said was, "I want to be the most feral of the bunch."'

Indeed, fearlessness was very much the order of the day – especially for a film that shows these creatures defecating, urinating and copulating. 'We grew up with dogs and cats! Every animal has some version of marking their territory, you know? And so it felt like it was essential that we depict them,' argues David. The brothers also weren't shy about showing the male Sasquatch's rather petite genitals. 'If you look at primate genitals, they're tiny,' he chuckles. 'But there's something that's funny about this hulking beast with tiny genitals!' **JAMES MOTTRAM**

**SASQUATCH SUNSET OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 14 JUNE.**

ICON

Louise Mauroy-Panzani stars as six-year-old Cléo

EXCLUSIVE

# LONG GOODBYE

## ÀMA GLORIA A child and her carer take centre stage in this first feature shot in Cape Verde...

**As a small child, French director Marie Amachoukeli-Barsacq was raised by the Portuguese caretaker of her building. 'When I was six years old, she had to go back to her country, to her family,' she explains. 'It was such a shock that I refused to say goodbye to her.' They did stay in touch, however, but it was not until five years ago that Amachoukeli-Barsacq began to question the relationship. 'I never asked myself: Who was that woman? Why did she have to come to France?'**

The director channelled all these questions and feelings into *Àma Gloria*, a film that boasts a remarkable performance from newcomer Louise Mauroy-Panzani as Cléo, a Parisian child who must contend with the departure of her nanny, Gloria (Ilça Moreno Zego), back to Cape Verde where she's from, to care for her own children. To mitigate her sadness, Cléo's widower father Arnaud (Arnaud Rebotini) allows her to spend the summer with Gloria in her homeland before they finally part ways.

Watching films such as *Ponette* and *Tomboy* to tutor her in ways of working with young actresses, Amachoukeli-Barsacq could only shoot four hours a day with Mauroy-Panzani. She also had to contend with working in the Creole language in Cape Verde, off the coast of West Africa – chosen because Moreno Zego came from there. 'You have no industry there,' she says. 'So you don't have any cameras… electricity sometimes doesn't work. It's difficult.'

**'Filming was difficult... you have no industry in Cape Verde'**
**MARIE AMACHOUKELI-BARSACQ**

Ilça Moreno Zego plays the child's nanny, Gloria

Remarkably, the film also features beautiful animated sequences, making it very different from a typical naturalistic drama. 'I was like, "How can I go to her mind and make the audience feel what she feels and she cannot express?"' She decided that showing Cléo's thoughts and emotions via images was the right approach. 'It took a year and a half. And I think it's 12 minutes of animation and one third of the budget.' Never again, she laughs. 'That's the last time!'

**JAMES MOTTRAM**

**ÀMA GLORIA OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 14 JUNE.**

BFI



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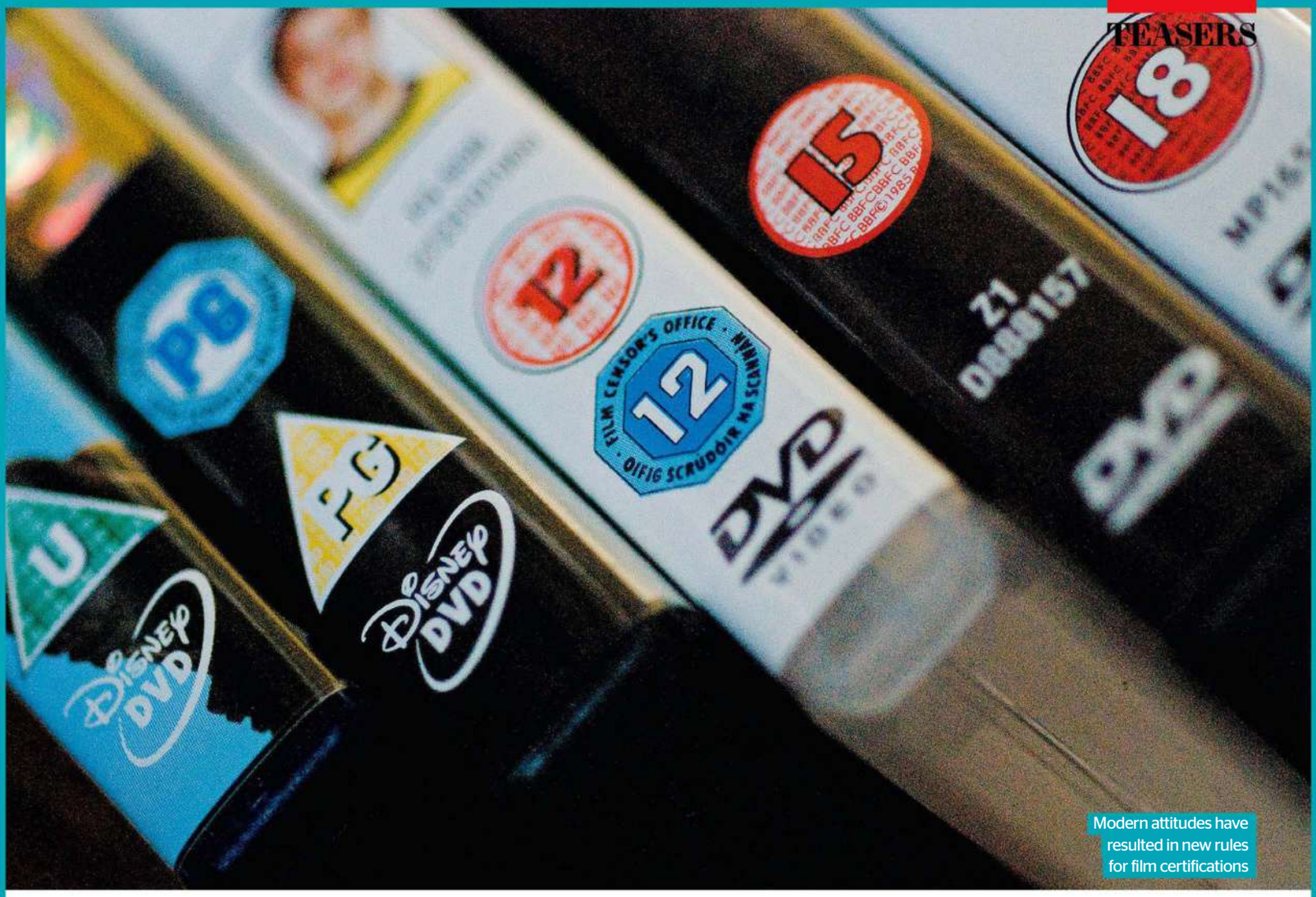


Modern attitudes have resulted in new rules for film certifications

ALAMY

# CAN WE TALK ABOUT?

## RATINGS RUMBLES

### DOES THE BBFC REALLY NEED TO TIGHTEN ITS GUIDELINES?

KEVIN HARLEY
@KEVINSHARLEY

**The British Board of Film Classification has repositioned itself in the headlines lately. Reports on ratings for films from 1964's *Mary Poppins* (which was rereleased in March) to 2024's *Poor Things* have stirred, in BBFC-speak, 'mild' debate. Now, the institution has drawn attention for its half-decade guidelines update, which suggests tighter restrictions on representations of sex and violence.**

Drawing on consultations with 12,000 participants by the group We Are Family, the BBFC – under president Natasha Kaplinsky – notes that 'people' are concerned. Not about 'cannabis use and solvent misuse' – the report notes relaxed attitudes there. They are concerned about sexualised or misogynist terms like 'bitch' or 'dick'. They're concerned about sexual content at the 12A/15 border, whatever that might be, though less so on the 15/18 borders if said content occurs in 'comic contexts'. Images of suicide, self-harm and sexual violence also stirred consideration, as did representations of 'particularly intense or impactful' violence that 'may cause harm to public health or morals'.

> 'WHAT EMERGES MOST STRONGLY FROM THE UPDATE IS A SENSE OF SELF-JUSTIFICATION'

The finer details of how on-screen violence 'may cause harm' are unclear, though recent ratings reports for new releases and resubmissions stir doubts about the institution's thinking. In 2022, generational tentpole *Watership Down* (1978) went from a U certificate to a PG partly because a gull tells a bunny to 'piss off'. Straw poll: anyone scarred by the gull? Thought not. *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979) also went from U to PG due to 'mild' this and 'mild' that, as if anything so 'mild' needs noting. Responding to complaints from young Bat-fans, the BBFC justified a 15 rating for 2022's *The Batman* by noting a 'pervasive… brooding, bleak' tone, which kind of comes with the cowl.

What emerges most strongly from the update is a sense of self-justification, a reminder of the BBFC's existence mounted on a declaration of its responsiveness to shifting opinion. Fair enough, perhaps; consistent and recognisable ratings guides may have value. But perhaps more detailed information about who the participants were, what they were asked and how they answered is needed – beyond the soundbites on the reports that, rather uniformly, applaud the BBFC's decisions – if we are to fully understand what exactly the BBFC is responding to.

Otherwise, even if we don't fear a return to the bad old years when the BBFC was run by James Ferman's firm hand, talk of tightened ratings and moral safeguarding might elicit 'mild' shudders of recognition.

FIRST WORD

# LET'S TWIST AGAIN

**TWISTERS** *Minari* director Lee Isaac Chung leads a new group of cyclone rangers in a standalone sequel to the 90s disaster film.

**The original *Twister* – which starred Helen Hunt and Bill Paxton as storm chasers on the brink of divorce, who are thrown back together during an extended spot of turbulent weather – was a massive box-office hit (the second-biggest of 1996) and a notable showcase for nascent digital VFX. Almost 30 years later, we're getting another film set within that world, though 'sequel' might not be quite the right word for the plurally titled *Twisters*.**

'I consider it a new chapter in this story that [screenwriter/producer] Michael Crichton and [director] Jan de Bont and that team had created,' *Twisters* director Lee Isaac Chung tells *Teasers*. 'This is just a new chapter in that world that they created, and also that concept of scientists that are, in a very adventurous way, chasing storms and doing scientific research.'

The fresh faces here include Glen Powell (*Top Gun: Maverick*) as cocksure storm chaser Tyler, with Daisy Edgar-Jones (*Normal People*) and Anthony Ramos (*In the Heights*) as Kate and Javi, young researchers with a background in studying tornadoes. The zeitgeisty cast also includes Daryl McCormack, Sasha Lane, Kiernan Shipka, Katy O'Brian and new Superman David Corenswet.

But it's perhaps Chung's involvement that most intrigues. To date, he's best known for the Oscar-nominated *Minari* (for which he was also nominated in the Director and Original Screenplay categories). On paper, that gentle, low-key drama about an immigrant family couldn't seem further from a full-scale disaster blockbuster. But *Twisters* belongs to a world Chung knows well.

'I saw *Twister* with my dad and my sister, and we went to the movie theatre for that,' he recalls. 'I grew up in Arkansas. Somehow, in that part of the country, *Twister* was a very big movie. We grew up around tornadoes. Just driving around in trucks, and seeing the weather, was a big part of growing up. So it was a movie I always loved.'

And despite that seemingly massive gulf between *Twisters* and his previous film, Chung does tease some similarities. 'In a way, it is very different,' he says. 'But I do feel like, with *Minari*, in some ways, I was making a disaster movie. Something that happens to the family is that they have to submit to the Earth, and also a big fire comes and takes away everything.'

Working on the VFX for that fire scene was also a pivotal moment for Chung. 'I loved doing that… And so after I made that film, I kept wondering: what would it be like to make a film in which I'm just focusing on that sort of spectacle, and that sort of awe, and that kind of powerful force? [Tornadoes] have the same sort of force that a fire does. It can really reveal people, their inner journeys, their relationships… So I was really interested in exploring that with this movie.' **MATT MAYTUM**

**TWISTERS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 19 JULY.**

**'I wondered: what would it be like to make a film focusing on that kind of powerful force?'**
**LEE ISAAC CHUNG**

MELINDA SUE GORDON/UNIVERSAL PICTURES & WARNER BROS. PICTURES & AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT



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# NEXT BIG THING

## HARRIET SLATER
## IS RIDING HIGH(LANDS)...

**Getting into community theatre at six years of age, Harriet Slater always knew she wanted to be an actor. Now, at 29, she has appeared in *Pennyworth* and *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*. This year started handsomely with *Belgravia: The Next Chapter*, she has horror movies *Tarot* and *True Haunting* due for release, and she's currently shooting *Outlander* prequel series *Blood of My Blood* in rugged Scotland.**

**_Outlander_ is a turbulently romantic show. Is _Blood of My Blood_ similar in tone?**
Yeah, mostly. It's created by the same team and we're filming in the same place. At its heart, it's the love story of Jamie's parents in 1700s Scotland, and also Claire's parents in World War One. The fans have been so supportive. People came pouring in with really lovely, welcoming messages.

**You're no stranger to operating in established IP – you've done _Pennyworth_ and _Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny_...**
They're worlds that people are very invested in. *Dial of Destiny* was madness. I had the tiniest part in that [playing New York citizen Fran]. It was literally a one-line thing. But oh my God, what an amazing franchise and world to be a part of!

**What's the deal with _Tarot_?**
I play Hayley. She and a group of friends are staying in a big old Airbnb. They go down into the basement in search of booze and come across this deck of tarot cards. My character is big into tarot, so she sits down and does everyone's readings. And then, lo and behold, people start dying in ways that are connected to the readings.

**You're in another horror, too – _True Haunting_. Wasn't it exhausting to act terrified for weeks on end?**
Yeah, 100 per cent! You're at level 10 quite a lot of the time. On *True Haunting*, I had three solid days of basically just crying and screaming. But it's also cathartic, because how often do you actually get to just let everything out?
**JAMIE GRAHAM**

**TAROT IS IN CINEMAS ON 3 MAY. TRUE HAUNTING IS TBC. BLOOD OF MY BLOOD IS 2025 TBC.**

DAVID REISS



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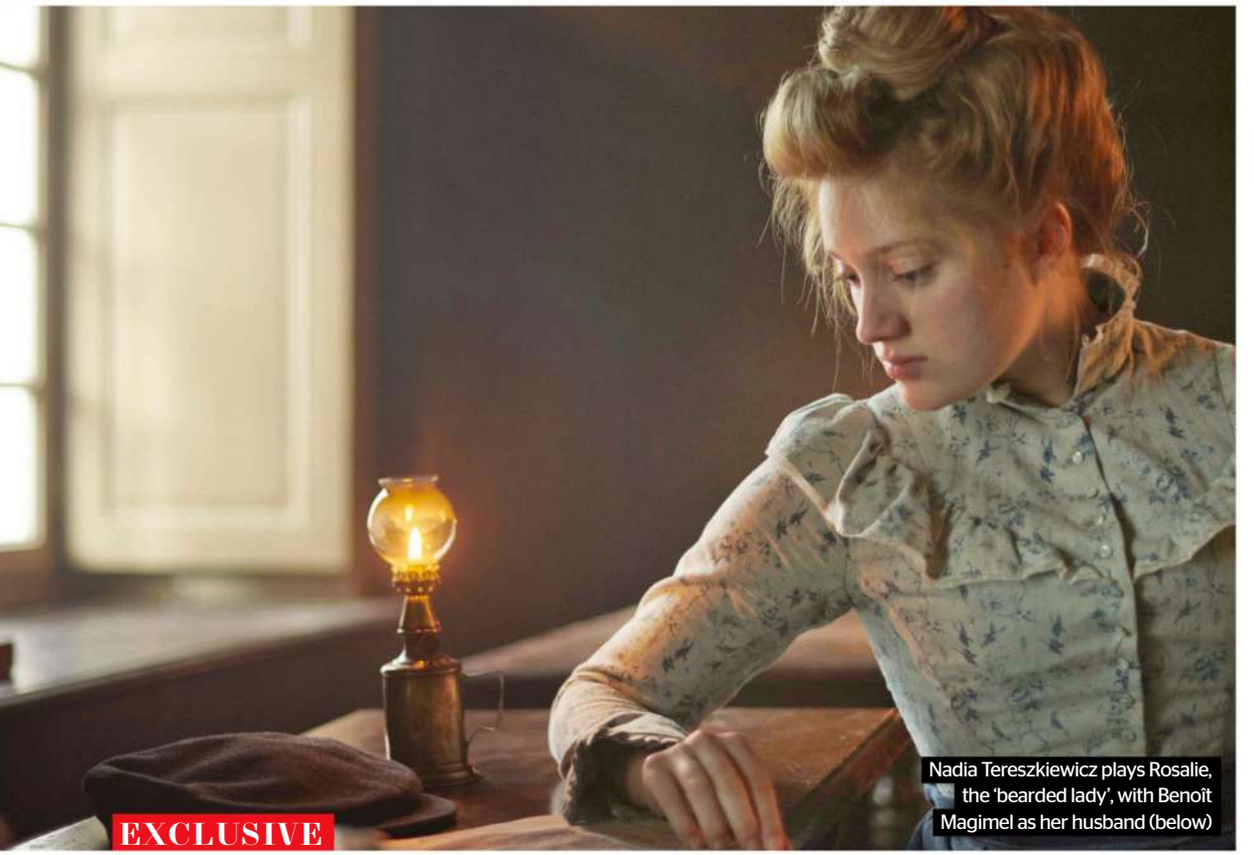

EXCLUSIVE

Nadia Tereszkiewicz plays Rosalie, the 'bearded lady', with Benoît Magimel as her husband (below)

# FACE VALUE

## ROSALIE Stéphanie Di Giusto's new drama looks at a bearded woman in 1870s France...

**When Stéphanie Di Giusto (2016's *The Dancer*) discovered the story of Clémentine Delait, known as the 'most illustrious and celebrated bearded lady in France' in the late 19th century, she was hooked. 'She always refused to be a carnival freak. She really just wanted to live her life as a woman and just stand for her own destiny, her own person', she tells *Teasers*.**

After researching 'other women who suffered from hirsutism', the French director decided, 'I didn't want to make a biopic – it really wasn't my intention.' So she instead conjured her own fictional story, *Rosalie*. The film stars Nadia Tereszkiewicz in the title role – a woman living in a small 1870s French community, who is about to marry debt-ridden café owner Abel (*The Taste of Things*' Benoît Magimel). But then, much to his horror, he discovers that she has to shave every day to conceal her hairiness – until Rosalie suggests she uses her appearance to attract curious customers to his ailing business.

Finding an actor to play Rosalie was no easy fix. After fruitless auditioning of many young actors, Di Giusto bumped into Tereszkiewicz, who'd featured in *The Dancer*. 'I offered her to come for a test. As soon as she put on the dress and the beard, it was something so natural, so organic for her, because I felt that all the actresses that came... there was something very disturbing for them. They started scratching their face, or they were awkward, something just didn't work. Whereas for Nadia it was so natural.'

Also casting Magimel ('the most talented... if not the best actor of his generation in French cinema,' says the director), Di Giusto calls the film 'an unconditional love story', especially as Abel gradually bonds with his wife. 'For me, the idea was to have sensuality in unexpected places, to change and play – or challenge – the codes of cinema and the kinds of bodies that we're used to seeing in love scenes and here have a kind of unexpected eroticism,' she says. 'And to surprise the audience with a sensuality that we can feel.' **JAMES MOTTRAM**

**ROSALIE OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 7 JUNE**

## Nadia Tereszkiewicz

**What did you think about Rosalie when you first read the script?**
I saw some proudness in her look and something that was strong and at the same time really feminine, because the movie questions femininity and where we put it and I saw something in the posture that I liked, and I wanted to know more.

**How did you find acting with Benoît Magimel?**
It's a huge chance because the way he was looking at me changed me every day. He's more than an actor in the way that he needs to create reality. So he rejected me in the first half of the movie... He rejected and was disgusted by the character, but also by me in the way that we didn't talk. I felt rejected. And I understood the huge generosity of that, because it created in me something... I tried to please him; I tried to have his attention, like the character.

**You speak Polish, French, English and Finnish. Which nationality is closest to you?**
I especially feel European. I don't know America. Of course, I would love to go there, but I have this passion for being European and to travel in European cinema that excites me a lot – to know that movies can travel. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

PICTUREHOUSE ENTERTAINMENT

Anthony Hopkins and Matthew Goode play Sigmund Freud and C.S. Lewis

EXCLUSIVE

# FINAL ANALYSIS

## FREUD'S LAST SESSION Two minds clash in a meeting between Sigmund Freud and C.S. Lewis.

**Full disclosure, my father's a psychiatrist,' director Matthew Brown says cheerily when he calls in from the Florida Keys to talk *Teasers* through his adaptation of Mark St. Germain's stage play, itself based on Armand Nicholi's book. A work of speculative fiction, it posits the idea that during the last weeks of his life and on the eve of World War Two, proud atheist Sigmund Freud met with C.S. Lewis – an Oxford don shaped by Christianity – to discuss life, death and faith. Did he actually? That's not the point, says Brown, drawn to the project by his family background and the loss in his life that attracts him to the exploration of death and immortality. 'I'm drawn to working some of that stuff out in my work, my art.'**

The project was nearly derailed by death; Christopher Plummer was cast to play Freud but passed away. Brown offered it again to Anthony Hopkins (he'd previously declined due to working on *The Father*) and was thrilled when he agreed. 'Then that began a year-long journey with Mr. Hopkins that was very unique. I don't expect to have it again with any other actor in my life. He just let me behind the curtain on a lifetime – he's examining his mortality and it was pretty incredible. He has his own process about how he gets [to a role]. It's very involved and meticulous and it was kind of beautiful. When somebody does it as well as Hopkins, you think it's just second nature, but he works really hard to this day, and he's 86.'

Casting Matthew Goode as Lewis ('Matthew belongs in the same room and on the same stage as Hopkins'), Brown was also interested in expanding the world of psychology outside of the two academics; bringing the work and life of Freud's daughter, Anna, into the mix, illustrating salient discussion points with flashbacks and exploring both men's mental roadblocks. 'You know, the thing with them is, even though they were these great minds, they both had such screwed-up, fucked-up relationships.'

**'One of the hardest things to do in life is to listen'**
**MATTHEW BROWN**

Hopkins was an early choice for the role

Though their possible meeting happened over eight decades ago and is steeped in early psychoanalysis and devout Christianity, Brown thinks that the Freud/Lewis debate has much to offer modern, polarised audiences. Despite their opposing beliefs, the two academics discuss their thoughts with respect and kindness. 'They're people having a civil conversation, which I felt like in the world today doesn't exist,' the director nods. 'One of the hardest things to do in life is to listen. And I suppose [the film] is a thought experiment in a sense – I think that human evolution depends on conversation.'

Most importantly, though, Brown's shrink dad approved of the finished product. 'He really enjoyed it! That was a big deal for me.' **JANE CROWTHER**

**FREUD'S LAST SESSION OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 14 JUNE.**

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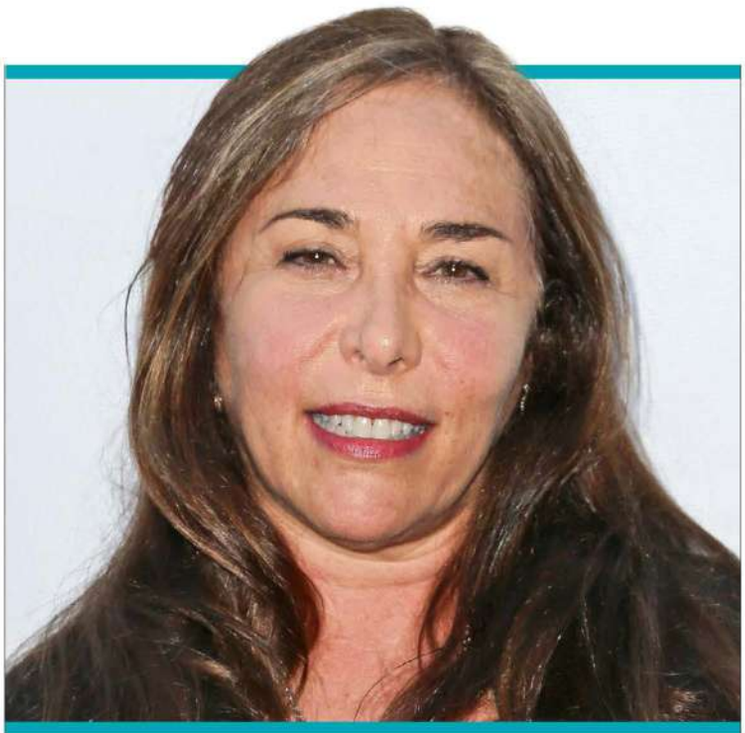
# THE HERO



## SUSAN SEIDELMAN
### THE DIRECTOR ON MADONNA, MARTIN SCORSESE AND MALE-DOMINATED HOLLYWOOD...

**Long before the likes of Greta Gerwig and Patty Jenkins, there was Susan Seidelman. Her new book, *Desperately Seeking Something: A Memoir about Movies, Mothers, and Material Girls*, recounts how she brought female-centred stories to the screen in an industry then dominated by men. Her debut, *Smithereens*, became America's first indie film to compete for Palme d'Or at Cannes. Her next movie, *Desperately Seeking Susan*, was a box-office smash that featured a young Madonna.**

**How did it feel when your first short film, *And You Act Like One Too*, was nominated for a Student Academy Award?**
It was a real breakthrough and affirmation for me that I was on to something with the stories I wanted to tell about women breaking out of boxes they found themselves in. Flawed people were interesting to me – I was drawn to [characters] like Jack Nicholson's [Randle] in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. I admired their fearlessness, but they were schemers, too. You didn't see many female versions of this on screen. I wanted to change that.

**What are your memories of your feature debut *Smithereens* competing at Cannes?**
Walking the red carpet was a very special moment. As a cash-strapped, aspiring filmmaker, you really don't know if you will ever make a career out of this. Cannes was the first moment I remember thinking I could be a filmmaker after all.

**How did Martin Scorsese help you at that time?**
He'd seen *Smithereens*, liked it and recommended me for the Directors Guild of America. I think he was aware of how few female directors there were and helped me out. I went to meet him on the set of *After Hours* – it was so educational and eye-opening. I was so grateful to him.

**Next, *Desperately Seeking Susan* was a huge success...**
Yes, and I'm very proud it was one of the first films in Hollywood to have an all-female creative team who pushed to get this made. It's a little easier now, but most big-budget studio movies are still made by men, despite the success of *Barbie* and *Wonder Woman*. There's still not salary equality for women in this business, either.

**What are your memories of working with Madonna?**
Madonna was still way under the radar – an aspiring musician who also wanted to be in movies. I remember her arriving for her audition in a taxi and she didn't have enough to pay for it: she borrowed money from the girl behind the desk at our casting office! Straight away, I thought that was funny, cheeky and there was something scrappy about her that seemed perfect for the role. I fought to hire her, but it was the studio boss' son who clinched it: he loved Madonna's music and told them to hire her!

**An unknown Bruce Willis also auditioned for the film...**
He was great! He wasn't cast, but at the end of filming, we had a wrap party and he was our bartender for the night, something he did in-between acting jobs. He thanked us for not casting him because, instead, he'd got the role in *Moonlighting* – his big break!

**Did you enjoy directing episodes of *Sex and the City*?**
I had no idea it would become a huge, hit TV series. I loved that there was a female friendship story at the heart of it and that chimed with a lot of my work. It was a full-circle moment directing female-centred stories once more in New York.

**What's the biggest lesson you've learned?**
A lot of people get disappointed if a movie gets bad reviews and they lose faith in themselves. You have to keep making stuff. You can't let other people's feelings about your work get to your soul and paralyse you.

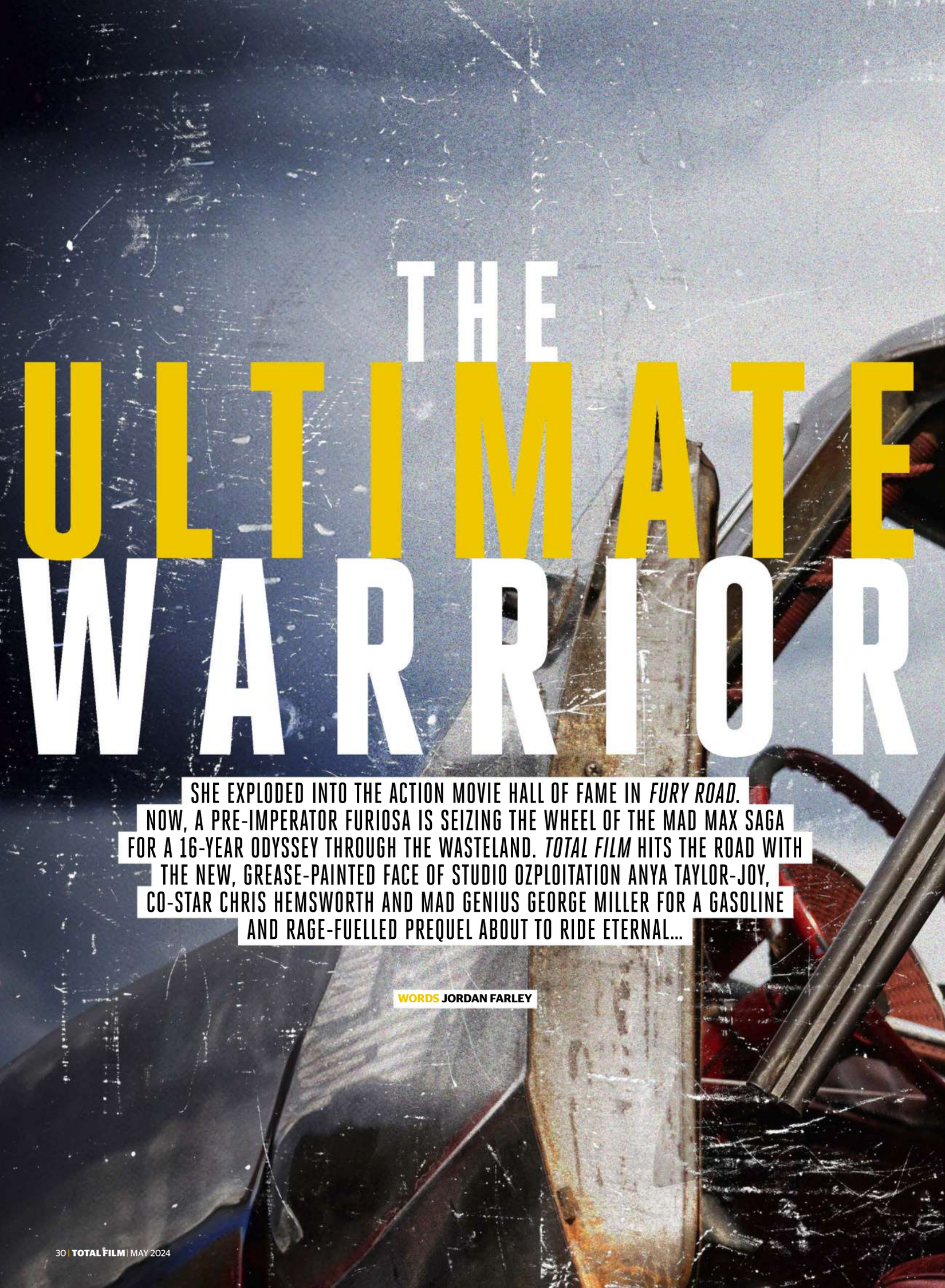
**ELIZABETH AUBREY**

> 'MADONNA WAS PERFECT FOR THE ROLE – SHE WAS FUNNY, CHEEKY AND SCRAPPY'

(From top) *Smithereens*, *Desperately Seeking Susan*, and Seidelman in 1982

ALAMY, GETTY

**DESPERATELY SEEKING SOMETHING: A MEMOIR ABOUT MOVIES, MOTHERS, AND MATERIAL GIRLS IS PUBLISHED ON 18 JUNE.**



# THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR

SHE EXPLODED INTO THE ACTION MOVIE HALL OF FAME IN *FURY ROAD*. NOW, A PRE-IMPERATOR FURIOSA IS SEIZING THE WHEEL OF THE MAD MAX SAGA FOR A 16-YEAR ODYSSEY THROUGH THE WASTELAND. *TOTAL FILM* HITS THE ROAD WITH THE NEW, GREASE-PAINTED FACE OF STUDIO OZPLOITATION ANYA TAYLOR-JOY, CO-STAR CHRIS HEMSWORTH AND MAD GENIUS GEORGE MILLER FOR A GASOLINE AND RAGE-FUELLED PREQUEL ABOUT TO RIDE ETERNAL...

WORDS **JORDAN FARLEY**

Anya Taylor-Joy takes on the role of Furiosa, playing a younger version of Charlize Theron's *Fury Road* character

There are some films no one forgets watching for the first time: *Jaws*, *Star Wars*, *Citizen Kane*. 2015's *Mad Max: Fury Road* is an inarguable addition to that list. A lunatic symphony conducted with euphoric precision, *Fury Road* didn't just raise the bar for vehicular carnage – it set the standard so high, even a careening Pole Cat couldn't hope to clear it. Speaking in 2017, Steven Soderbergh put the achievement of director George Miller and his creative team best: 'I don't understand how they're not still shooting that film and I don't understand how hundreds of people aren't dead.'

A similarly awestruck Chris Hemsworth can still recall the details of watching *Fury Road* for the first time. 'I remember, I was at the Electric Cinema on Portobello Road,' the action veteran tells *Total Film* over Zoom, smile widening. 'I'd been in the industry for a number of years at that point and it was becoming harder and harder to be surprised. I came out, called my agent, and said, "I have to work with George Miller in any way, shape, or form."'

Anya Taylor-Joy, the 28-year-old star with the unenviable task of stepping into Charlize Theron's skull-crusher boots as Furiosa, was filming the sci-fi horror film *Morgan* in Belfast when Miller's action opus smashed into cinemas. 'As a cast bonding experience, we all went to see *Fury Road*,' says Taylor-Joy, in LA for Oscars weekend as we speak. 'I was riveted. And when it finished, I remember having the feeling of: "That is one of the best films I've ever seen."'

Two things are universally known about *Fury Road*: it kicks ass to an unprecedented level, and it was absolute hell to make. The road to reviving Mad Max – dormant for three decades following 1985's *Beyond Thunderdome* – was so long and arduous that during development Miller and co-writer Nick Lathouris didn't just write *Fury Road*, they dreamed up two further entries. A sequel, *The Wasteland*, would continue Max Rockatansky's peripatetic journey across the ecologically ravaged Earth, while a prequel, *Furiosa*, would recount the brutal backstory of *Fury Road*'s most important new addition.

'We had finished the script of *Furiosa* before we shot *Fury Road*,' Miller confirms over Zoom from Sydney, sitting in front of a phalanx of storyboards for his latest entry in a 45-year-old saga. That *Furiosa* emerged from the same creative maelstrom as *Fury Road* can only be a good thing. 'We already knew the backstories. We



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One 15-minute sequence took 78 days to film

Chris Hemsworth joins the saga as the evil Dementus

had to, in order to tell *Fury Road*. What happened to Max the year before this? How come he found his way in the Wasteland? All that sort of thing. And how did Furiosa get there? Why did she become a Praetorian in service of Immortan Joe?'

For a brief time, *Furiosa* was even developed as an anime spin-off – then called *The Peach* – which Mahiro Maeda (*Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *Kill Bill Vol. 1*) was set to direct. 'So *Furiosa* was ready, in a story sense, 15 years ago,' says Doug Mitchell, Miller's long-serving producing partner. 'And it's been percolating, the way things do in George's brain, ever since.'

Despite the ecstatic reaction to *Fury Road*, work on *Furiosa* stalled, reportedly while Miller and studio Warner Bros settled a legal dispute. In the interim, Miller moved to make passion-project *Three Thousand Years of Longing*, but always kept one eye on *Furiosa*, evolving the script in response to the successes of *Fury Road*. 'The hierarchy of the Wasteland with Immortan Joe, the Citadel, Gastown and Bullet Farm, which are all alluded to or seen in *Fury Road* – these were developed a bit more,' Miller says.

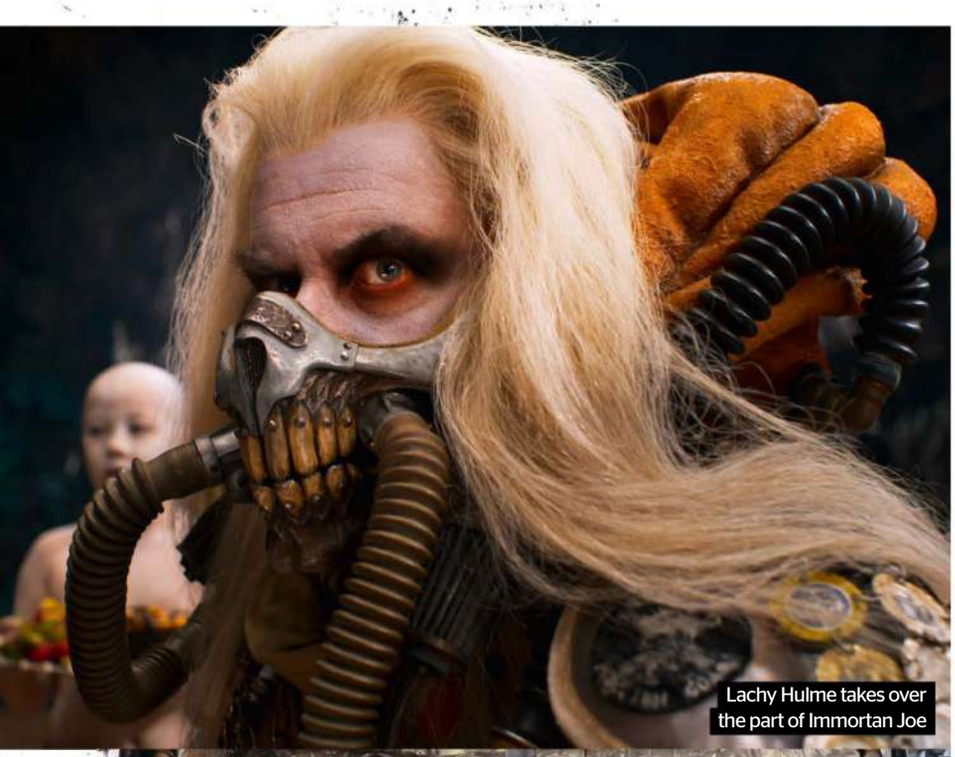
'IT WAS ONE OF THE BEST SCRIPT-READING EXPERIENCES I'VE HAD... FILLED WITH IMAGERY'

CHRIS HEMSWORTH

Eventually, the script reached a gargantuan 250 pages, as opposed to a more traditional 120-page Hollywood script. But this was no ordinary screenplay. 'It was one of the best script-reading experiences I've had because the script itself was filled with storyboards and imagery and long passages of information like you'd see in a novel,' Hemsworth explains. 'It was the most detailed document that I'd ever seen. I was like, "Why isn't every script like this?" And I realised, "Well, George Miller didn't write the others."'

## DRIVE TO SURVIVE

For all its intricately detailed world-building, compelling character dynamics, thematic complexity and thrilling lack of restraint, *Fury Road*'s story is as simple as they come – a pure A to B (and back to A) chase movie



Lachy Hulme takes over the part of Immortan Joe

Tom Burke plays Praetorian Jack, pilot of the War Rig

set over two days and three nights. In contrast, Miller describes *Furiosa*'s story, which takes place over 16-odd years, as an 'odyssey' that puts its eponymous character on a crash course with rival warlords Dementus (Hemsworth) and Immortan Joe (Lachy Hulme, stepping in for Hugh Keays-Byrne, who died in 2020). 'We follow Furiosa from the age of 10 all the way through to her mid-to-late 20s. It runs straight into *Fury Road*, virtually. So that just naturally is a saga,' says Miller.

Though told largely on the move, amid outrageous automobile mayhem, much of Furiosa's backstory is conveyed in *Fury Road*, including her abduction as a child from the Green Place. According to Taylor-Joy, that doesn't undercut the power of, ahem, witnessing it first-hand in *Furiosa*. 'I think you can hear about the horror, but seeing it is an entirely different thing,' she teases. 'I have a very different relationship to it – my characters feel like real people to me – but I cry immediately when I see the things that this girl was confronted with. It's pretty harrowing.'

Miller – who often compares his role as a filmmaker to that of a composer – notes that *Furiosa* possesses 'a different cadence and a different rhythm' to *Fury Road*; something Hemsworth was also struck by upon reading the script. 'There was a great sense of continuity to what had been done before. But what was exciting was, with a lot of the dialogue, there was a sort of Shakespearean tone to it,' he says. 'It's an epic tale. You see a real growth and change in the characters, or the demise in others. You see the environments they inhabit break down.' He pauses, and grins. 'But it has some insane action in it, as well.'

English actor Tom Burke, who plays War Rig driver Praetorian Jack, describes the film as a 'companion piece' to *Fury Road*, with 'a different tempo to the whole thing'. For better or worse, Miller has never rested on his laurels with the series, each largely standalone entry upending expectations of what a Mad Max movie can be. *Furiosa* might just be Miller's biggest swing yet – a structurally radical prequel with direct narrative connections to its predecessor that doesn't even feature the iconic character the series is named for. An even bigger swing: recasting Furiosa.

## NATURE OF THE BEAST

### CHRIS HEMSWORTH ON HOW HE BUILT HIS STRANGEST CHARACTER YET.

'I got offered the part [of Dementus] three years before we started shooting. I had all this energy, and this creative discussion was pouring out of me, but I didn't have an initial, strong opinion on who the character was. The months would go by. A year would go by. On year two, I'd go, "It'll come to me." I'd keep reading, and keep discussing things with George. I got about two weeks out, and thought, "Shit, now I'm starting to worry."

'George suggested to me to journal as the character, which I hadn't done before. It was 2am one night. I was awake, and I just put pen to paper, and just started scribbling down thoughts and ideas as Dementus. I didn't think much of it. I went to sleep, and woke up, and was quite shocked at what came out of me in that half-asleep state. I went into rehearsal, and showed George, and we both went, "That's it. That's the direction we've got to go."

'A lot of it was about his trauma, and the tragedies in the Wasteland that led him to become the individual that he was. It gave me a better sense of empathy for this villainous, pretty ugly personality. I started to see a way in, and a "why" to his actions.

'It's not to excuse any of the horrific shit he does in the film, but to empathise with him, in a strange way, and develop a greater understanding of who he was.' **JF**

Miller was sold on Anya Taylor-Joy after seeing her work in *Last Night in Soho*

## TAYLOR MADE

Talking of iconic characters, few would dispute that Furiosa deserves the same label. Played with ferocious tenacity, intimidating physicality and heartbreaking vulnerability by Charlize Theron, Furiosa shined so bright that she eclipsed Max in his own movie. 'I fell in love with Furiosa through Charlize's interpretation of it,' Taylor-Joy smiles. 'Her performance left an indelible mark on me. [Charlize has] been so classy, and kind, and generous with me. I just feel very lucky.'

The idea of digitally de-aging Theron was explored but quickly dismissed ('Even in the hands of really masterful filmmakers like Martin Scorsese and Ang Lee, it just wasn't working,' Miller notes), and it was a pre-pandemic sneak peek at *Last Night in Soho*, and Edgar Wright's subsequent endorsement of Taylor-Joy, that put the actor in Miller's mind for his Furiosa prequel. 'When I think about it, I'm like, "What about me swanning down a bunch of steps, and singing *Downtown* was like, 'Yes, that's my Furiosa'?"' Taylor-Joy says with a chuckle. 'I think I recognised in Anya that she has the same resolute quality that Charlize has as an actor and as a person,' explains Miller, who was also drawn to the fact that Taylor-Joy, like Theron, trained in ballet. 'They're both very physically precise and adept, as they are emotionally precise. There was a certain overlap between the two of them.'

Describing an 'extreme protectiveness' over Furiosa as a fan, Taylor-Joy nevertheless considered her responsibility, 'first and foremost', to the script and its depiction of a nascent Furiosa still being forged in a crucible of fire and blood. 'It was a really big conversation that George and I had,' Taylor-Joy says. 'The Furiosa you meet in *Fury Road*, she's the lead driver of the War Rig, so she's had access to a lot of resources, to protein, to this, to that. I didn't want her to look like a superhero, because that is the beauty of these films: they're not superhero movies; they're what happens to the human mind and body when you are pushed to that kind of extreme.'

> 'I THINK I RECOGNISED IN ANYA THAT SHE HAS THE SAME RESOLUTE QUALITY THAT CHARLIZE HAS AS AN ACTOR AND A PERSON'
> GEORGE MILLER

Subject to four-and-a-half-hour sessions in the make-up chair to become the full, bionic-armed Imperator, Taylor-Joy claims the decision to don a bald cap in the film, rather than a real buzzcut, was at the request of her director. 'I was so ready to shave my head,' Taylor-Joy exclaims. 'I was really excited to do it! Then George, in his absolute gentleness, saw me, and touched my hair, and went, "No." [laughs].' Taylor-Joy also surprised Miller with the lengths she was willing to go to in other ways. 'I will say, my background in horror, and my deep love for the extreme, did actually result in, a few times, out-crazy-ing George. I felt very proud of those moments where he's like, "That's quite depraved, Anya!"'

## THE WILD ONE

Depravity and insanity are par for the course in the world of *Furiosa*, and Dementus might be the most deranged denizen of the Wasteland to date. 'I certainly understood the beautiful madness that I was going to be a part of,' says Hemsworth, who makes a rare departure from (super)heroics to play a true rotter. The leader of the biker horde, Dementus is 'a variation of a theme that we've seen over and over again, right through our history – a tyrannical figure who has the charisma to bring people along with him,' explains Miller.

As with *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the majority of the effects in *Furiosa* are practical, not CGI

'We discussed a lot of historic dictators that expressed power and dominance through violence and fear,' adds Hemsworth, who developed the character with Miller over the course of three years (see boxout, p34). 'He gave people's fear a face and presented himself as the one person that was going to free them from their current suffering.' Dementus' caricatured appearance and way of speaking also evolved from this historical grounding. 'There is a familiar attempt to be larger than life and all-knowing. Even the profile of Dementus, with the prosthetic nose – there was something historic about that shape.'

According to Hemsworth, that prosthetic schnozz was Miller's idea, but one he embraced wholeheartedly. 'I got pretty excited, and went right into it looking like a hobbit. I was like, "Bigger! More! Larger!" I was turning myself into a Halloween costume, and George was like, "It's got to be grounded in some truth." So he pulled me back a bit!' Like Taylor-Joy, Hemsworth spent 'three to four hours' in make-up every morning, having both a prosthetic nose and a coarse yak-hair beard painstakingly applied. 'It was a torturous process,' he admits. 'I started at about 3am. So by the time I got to set, I had an appropriate amount of frustration and irritation that then echoed through my performance.'

Responsible for abducting Furiosa from the Vuvalini and seemingly murdering her mother, Dementus perversely sees himself as a 'paternal' figure to Furiosa who 'protected her from the dangers of this life, and prepared her for the violent world that she is about to grow up in', according to Hemsworth. Taylor-Joy sees their dynamic somewhat differently. 'My inner Furiosa wants to rip Chris' face off!' she says with a laugh. 'For her, he becomes a very easy arrow point of all of the hurt that she has experienced in her life. George spoke often about creating a worthy opponent for Furiosa, and the film is gearing up towards a fever pitch of when these two people are going to make contact.'

Though not Furiosa's main antagonist – yet, anyway – Immortan Joe is a major roadblock for Dementus. '[Coming face to face with Immortan Joe] was probably the biggest "pinch myself" moment I've ever had,' Hemsworth beams. 'That outfit, the wig – that image is so iconic. I don't think we've ever seen Immortan being manipulated like we see in this.' For Taylor-Joy, the parallels between Immortan Joe, who Furiosa serves

Chris Hemsworth now keeps the three-bike chariot at his home



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as a means for vengeance, and Dementus are clear. 'When I zoom out of her story, I see it as this woman with impossible hope, attempting to make her own course in life. And the course she's having to take is absolutely destroyed by these two men.'

## DESERT STORM

Destruction is the apposite word in the world of Mad Max. Celebrated by audiences and revered by filmmakers, *Fury Road*'s largely practical action set-pieces remain an unqualified movie-making wonder, which is why Miller getting the band back together (literally, if you include the returning Doof Warrior) behind the scenes of *Furiosa* – including Second Unit Director Guy Norris, editor Margaret Sixel and visual effects supervisor Colin Gibson – is a gleefully tantalising prospect.

The film was shot predominantly at Broken Hill (where Miller filmed *Mad Max 2* in 1981 and was due to shoot *Fury Road* before unprecedented rainfall forced a move to Namibia) and the sand dunes of Sydney; over 1,000 people worked across *Furiosa*'s two main units, which shot for 109 and 130 days each, all under Miller's watchful eye. 'Now, that's like nothing anybody really does,' says Mitchell, who adds that a 'backup' team of editors created a near-instant 'assembly edit' of the film as they were shooting, so Miller was constantly aware of what he did and didn't have.

All the innovative 'tools' that Miller and Sixel developed on *Fury Road* – shooting and cutting with 'flow' in mind, placing the focal point of the action in the centre of the frame during fast-paced sequences – were applied to *Furiosa*. Miller describes his filmmaking style as a 'mosaic art'. This process of short takes – some seconds long, capturing precisely what he needs and nothing more – flummoxed Theron and, particularly, Tom Hardy on *Fury Road*, causing the latter to 'panic' and bringing out 'erratic behaviours' that, says Miller, contributed to that film's chaotic production. But the cast of *Furiosa* had the benefit of knowing that such a process can result in, well, *Fury Road*.

'These movies are big, colossal beasts, and it's a type of filmmaking where it's all stitched together so surgically

'Take me hoooome, *Fury Road*...'

Hemsworth and Miller spent time discussing historic dictators to inform Dementus

'HE GAVE PEOPLE'S FEAR A FACE AND PRESENTED HIMSELF AS THE ONE PERSON THAT WAS GOING TO FREE THEM'

CHRIS HEMSWORTH

that you can feel a bit lost in it,' admits Taylor-Joy, who was given two words of advice by Nux actor Nicholas Hoult while they filmed *The Menu* together: trust George. 'I would watch the first 10 minutes of *Fury Road* over and over again, just to understand how all of it worked.'

As for the all-important set-pieces, while no one is claiming the film will out-muscle *Fury Road* (what possibly could?), Mitchell points out that *Furiosa* 'has one 15-minute sequence which took us 78 days to shoot', with close to 200 stunt people working on it daily. Known during production as 'Stairway to Nowhere', the sequence marks a turning point for *Furiosa*. 'George and I would have these big conversations about why this particular set-piece was so long,' says Taylor-Joy, who still doesn't have a driver's licence, despite learning to do a J-turn on her first day of stunt school. 'It's because you see an accumulation of skills over the course of a battle, and that's very important for understanding how resourceful Furiosa is, but also her grit. It's the longest sequence any of us have ever shot. On the day we finished, everybody got a "Stairway To Nowhere" wine!'

While Taylor-Joy spent weeks clambering over, under and around a War Rig, Burke as the Rig's go-to pilot had a comfortable view of the mayhem from behind the wheel. 'There's so much going on; that's what was so thrilling about it,' he says. 'You could see stunts

'Jump in! We're getting the band back together'

happening ahead of you, in one's periphery. It's exactly as you might imagine watching it: everything is happening in widescreen.'

For Hemsworth, the experience of riding atop the suitably OTT vehicles was even more overwhelming. 'I felt incredibly small propped up on top of the Monster Truck, just hanging on as someone's doing big donuts in the sand – that was a lot of fun!' he says. As for the three-bike chariot, Hemsworth describes it as 'uncomfortable, loud, not really very practical… but it looks cool as hell!' He notes: 'It's actually in my house at the moment. It's next to a couple of Mjolnirs and Stormbreakers…'

Objects in the rear-view mirror may be closer than they appear

Both vehicles were built for real, naturally, and despite concerns about the amount of CGI in *Furiosa*'s trailers, Miller claims he's using VFX no more liberally here than he did on *Fury Road*, and primarily for practical and safety considerations. 'You need something in the frame to be real, and preferably the thing the majority of eyes will be scanning, when the shot appears,' he explains. 'The visual effects supervisor, Andrew Jackson, is somebody who started off with real effects and props, and has carried it into his work. And it fits very well with how I believe things should be done, and how the Mad Max world requires that to be the case.'

## MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Speaking to Miller is something of a surreal experience. Despite being the maestro behind several of the most crazed movies of the past 45 years (including *Babe: Pig in the City*), he's an unfailingly avuncular presence, on and off set. 'How does this chaotic space come from his imagination?' Hemsworth wonders to this day. 'I think it's why it works. You could be doing something so violent and dangerous and chaotic, but you can surrender to it, because he is the eyes and ears to all of it.'

Taylor-Joy echoes that, adding: 'George, more than any other director that I've worked with, really paints his scenes. You can do eight takes of something on second unit, and then you'll get a call in from George, who's seen it, and he's like, "Anya's helmet has to be one centimetre further up on her head." And it's like, "Right, bin those. Go again." Because he's very precise about exactly what it is he wants to see.'

JASIN BOLAND. WARNER BROS



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# MAD WORLD

## *TF* DARES TO LOOK AT THE MOST BONKERS BADDIES TO TAKE ON MAX...

### TOECUTTER (MAD MAX)

The leader of the Acolytes Motorcycle Gang that terrorises the outback, Toecutter (RSC actor Hugh Keays-Byrne) mows down Max's wife and son. Ruthless, greedy and sarcastic, he's also educated and strategic, and even shows evidence of a conscience when he's not raping, killing, or harming animals.

### LORD HUMUNGUS (MAD MAX 2)

Wearing a hockey mask a year before Jason Voorhees found his look, Lord Humungus (Kjell Nilsson) rides a modified Ford F-100 and wields a Trident Spear while leading the psychotic Marauders in their pursuit of oil. He is, naturally, on a collision course with Max – literally, in the explosive climax.

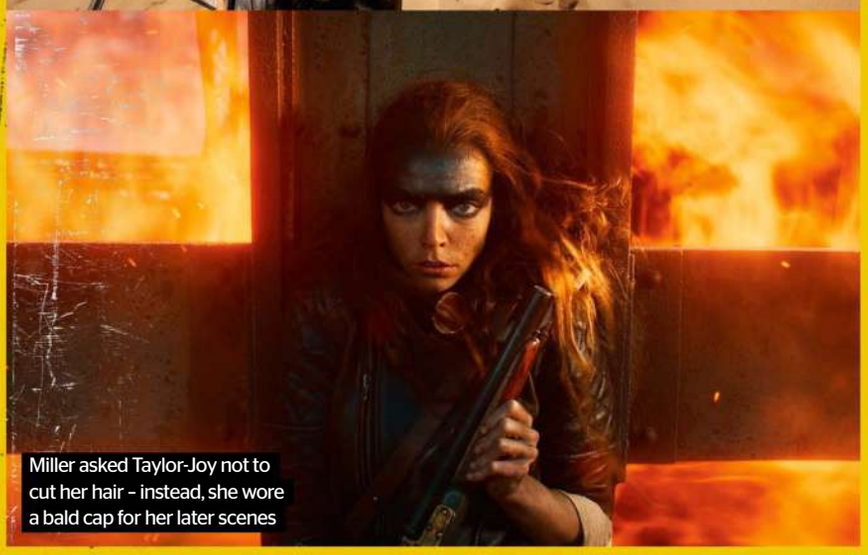
### MASTER BLASTER (MAD MAX BEYOND THUNDERDOME)

When it comes to the apocalypse, together is stronger. So Master (Angelo Rossitto, 2ft 11in) is the brains and the masked Blaster (Paul Larsson, a 6ft 8in plumber from Sydney) is the brawn – and between them they rule Bartertown. George Miller first had the idea when he considered a sparrow sitting on a rhino's back.

### RICTUS ERECTUS (MAD MAX: FURY ROAD)

The (morning) glory of the name suits the man – an angry, bulging, vein-popping colossus with a bald head, played by 6ft 11" strongman champ Nathan Jones. Rictus Erectus is the youngest son of Immortan Joe, and joins the war party in pursuit of Imperator Furiosa and Max. His death, as you'd expect, is... explosive. **JG**

Filming returned to Australia for this movie, including Sydney's sand dunes



Miller asked Taylor-Joy not to cut her hair – instead, she wore a bald cap for her later scenes

**'GEORGE, MORE THAN ANY OTHER DIRECTOR THAT I'VE WORKED WITH, REALLY PAINTS HIS SCENES... HE'S VERY PRECISE'**
**ANYA TAYLOR-JOY**

Miller's control over the frame even extends to the screening process, with the film only shown to cast and crew in black and white (or should that be black and chrome?) until work is complete. 'He doesn't show you the film in colour until the premiere, basically, because he doesn't want you to look at all the unfinished VFX shots and be distracted by that,' Hemsworth explains. 'He just wants a pure reaction to the story, which I think is quite beneficial.'

Due to a combination of the actors' strike and his previously announced time off from acting, Hemsworth hasn't shot anything since filming wrapped on *Furiosa* way back in October 2022. 'And as I search for what I'm going to do next, the bar has been raised so high that I don't know if I'm ever going to have an experience like it again, unfortunately,' he says with candour. 'To have a script that is so incredible you want to do it justice, and every ounce of your being is committed to making it work – I don't know that I'll ever top it.'

'I feel such a kinship to anybody who has made a film like this, because it's the definition of: unless you've experienced it, you just don't know what it's like,' adds Taylor-Joy. 'You can prepare, but it's like being melded in fire. It gave me such an incredible sense of satisfaction. I think we're all addicted to a bit of chaos, and a bit of the impossible now.' One thing's for sure: no one will forget *Furiosa* in a hurry.

**FURIOSA: A MAD MAX SAGA OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 24 MAY.**

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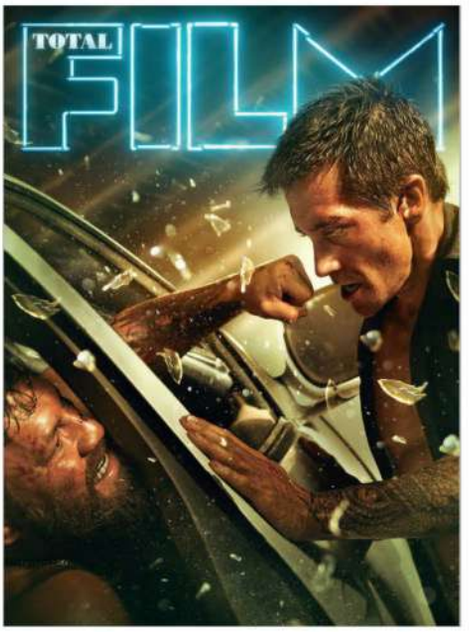

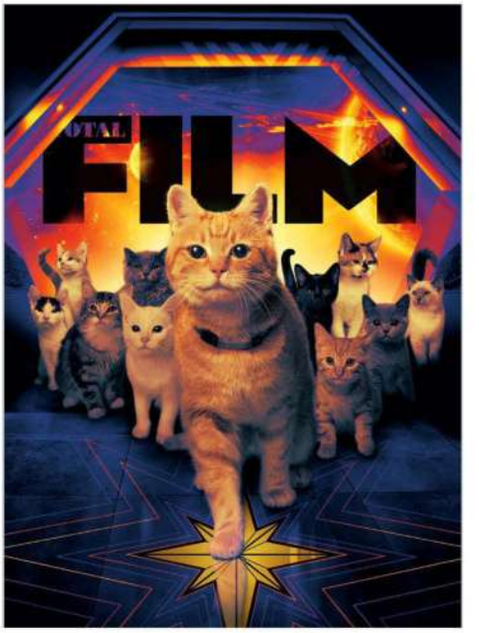

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# THE ACOLYTE

STAR WARS ENTERS A NEW, UNCHARTED ERA WITH THE ACOLYTE, A MARTIAL ARTS-HEAVY SAGA THAT PROMISES TO EXPLORE GOOD, EVIL AND THE FIGHT SIDE OF THE FORCE. *TOTAL FILM* MEETS CREATOR LESLYE HEADLAND AND HER CAST TO FIND OUT WHY THIS TIME, IT'S UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL...

**WORDS** **MATTHEW LEYLAND**



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# FORCE

Amandla Stenberg makes an entrance as 'dangerous warrior' Mae

What is an acolyte? 'In Sith lore, there's an apprentice,' says Leslye Headland. 'And under the apprentice, there's an acolyte. So it's a job that someone needs to fill…' Who is that someone in Lucasfilm's new eight-episode show, which features familiar faces (Carrie-Anne Moss as a Jedi Master, Jodie Turner-Smith as a high-powered witch) but a ton of new characters? The smart money is on Mae (Amandla Stenberg) – a 'dangerous warrior' who has history with Jedi Master Sol (*Squid Game*'s Lee Jung-jae). But as the trailer reminds us, appearances can deceive…

Described by creator/showrunner Headland (*Russian Doll*) as a 'mystery', *Star Wars: The Acolyte* is set in a previously unexplored time: 100-odd years pre-*The Phantom Menace*, at the tail end of the High Republic era (see overleaf). It's a time of peace, but darkness is on the rise – and Headland is keen to explore the shadows: 'What I was interested in asking here was, "How do the villains come to think that they're *right*?"'

Carrie-Anne Moss as Jedi Master Indara

## MARTIAL ARTISTRY

**Leslye Headland [creator/showrunner/executive producer]:** My original pitch for the show was a fully new story, one that wasn't attached to a legacy character. This was back in 2019, so initially it wasn't attached to the High Republic either, because that was just starting up. The story was a very personal one to me, told through the lens of Star Wars. And then I leaned into something George Lucas was inspired by: samurai and wuxia films. Because with *The Mandalorian* leaning into westerns – another influence on George – it felt like it would be fun to go in the other direction, into martial arts.

Films like *Come Drink with Me* [1966], *A Touch of Zen* [1971], even *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* [2000], a lot of these are about family member versus family member, master versus apprentice. They involve smaller conflicts.

Amandla Stenberg's Mae is one of the show's potential acolytes

Lee Jung-jae is Jedi Master Sol, teacher to the Jedi 'younglings'

And because I wanted *The Acolyte* to take place in a period that wasn't going to mess with any legacy characters or canon, it felt like a good reference point would be martial-arts movies, where the 'war' is between two or three people fighting, as opposed to spaceships and a mega-weapon like the Death Star.

## (IM)MORAL CHARACTERS

**Lee Jung-jae [Master Sol]:** The character I play is a Jedi Master, who's a teacher to the Jedi younglings. And he's someone who takes part in the investigation of a very mysterious crime…

**Amandla Stenberg [Mae]:** My character is someone who forces [Sol] to fix a lot of things about himself that he's been avoiding.

**LJ-j:** Amandla's character is very powerful, and their dynamic with Sol is very intriguing. I think viewers will have a great time waiting to see how their relationship will unfold, right up to the end.

**AS:** When we first meet [Mae] she has a lot of emotional progress to make, which makes her trajectory really interesting.

**Dafne Keen [Jecki]:** I play a Jedi Padawan, who's very serene, very calm. She's also a perfectionist and an overachiever. She has a kind of sibling relationship with Yord [Charlie Barnett], who's a Jedi Knight. He's older than her, but she's kind of the grown-up. And they quarrel all the time.

**Charlie Barnett [Yord]:** The love is there, but we butt heads, for sure. We both have the same dreams and wishes for whatever situation we're in, but their tactics of getting there are vastly different.

DISNEY

**Rebecca Henderson [Vernestra Rwoh]:** I don't want to use the word 'badass', but Vernestra is such a badass. She's a revered Jedi Master. The series is set about 100 years on from when we've seen Vernestra [in other High Republic media], so she's certainly an elder, who thinks she's seen it all.

**Manny Jacinto [Qimir]:** Qimir is an everyday guy minding his own business. Leslye has described him as a former smuggler. He's just doing his own thing and gets pulled into this whole storyline, whether he likes it or not. He's trying to do his best, but has certain faults…

**LH:** I've always been interested in taking immoral or amoral characters and then slowly, over the course of the story, getting the audience to understand the humanity and vulnerability of those characters.

One of the key aspects of Star Wars is the individual or underdog versus the institution; and if that reigning institution is the Jedi, no matter how benevolent they are, there will be people who disagree with them. So, I was like, 'Well, who are these people?' George and Dave Filoni have already explored so much about the Jedi and how they tick, so I felt this was a new way in.

## SETS AND VIOLENCE

**LJ-j:** The shooting environment was actually quite similar to [South Korean productions], but of course, it's Star Wars. So the great scale of it was very interesting to witness. And throughout the filming process I was on the tip of my toes at all times. It was such a great experience.

**RH:** I did very little green-screen work, which was very helpful. The sets were huge, and mostly practically built. At one point we're in a forest… and they built the forest.

**MJ:** It was a cold winter in the UK when we shot there…

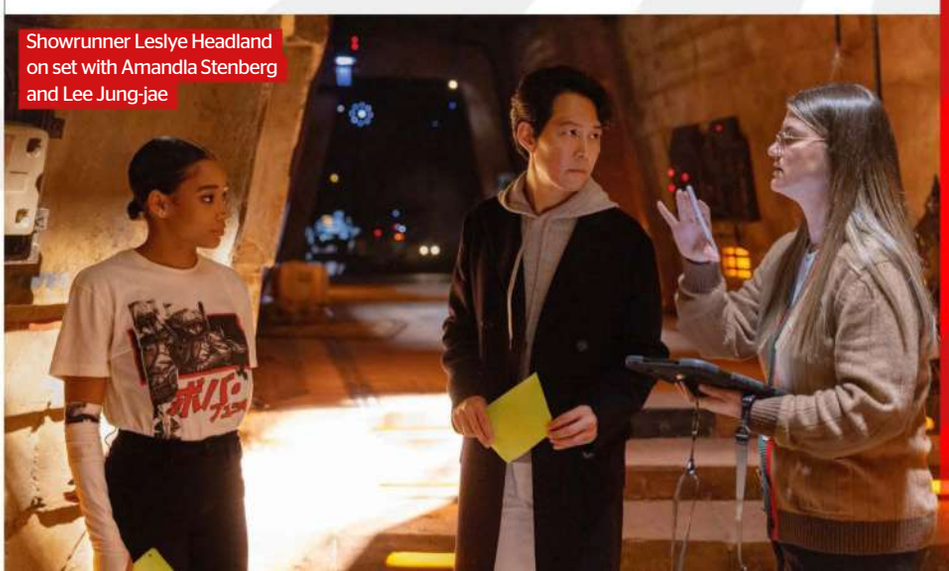
> 'WHAT I WAS INTERESTED IN ASKING WAS, "HOW DO THE VILLAINS COME TO THINK THEY'RE *RIGHT*?"' LESLYE HEADLAND

If we do a second season, I'm going to ask Leslye that we do it over the summer!

**LH:** We used a lot of practical effects, a lot of puppets, a lot of wire work. And I have to say, a lot of the cast did their own action. We had an incredible stunt team, but the action the actors did was fantastic.

**LJ-j:** Because my character is teaching younglings, you had to be really well trained in martial arts. I had to pay particular attention to making sure that each action, the speed, everything had to be perfect.

**AS:** Leslye held a screening of *Kill Bill* for us when we



Showrunner Leslye Headland on set with Amandla Stenberg and Lee Jung-jae

Indara and Mae come to blows

Joonas Suotamo plays the Wookiee Kelnacca

> 'WE HAD WEEKLY SESSIONS OF FORCE TRAINING WITH A MOVEMENT COACH. IT WAS REALLY FUN' DAFNE KEEN

first came to set, which was an amazing way of setting the tone. I spent about seven weeks doing stunt and fight training, and I realised that there's such a big difference between choreography and actual martial arts, in that the [filmed] movements are larger and more performative so that they can be read by the camera. I was at a Muay Thai class recently, throwing punches, and the instructor was like, 'What are you doing? You're taking your hand all the way out to Timbuktu!' [laughs]

*Better Call Saul*'s Jennifer L. Bryan designed the costumes for the show

## SABER PARTY

**LJ-j:** [Referring to the scene, shown in the trailer, where the Jedi prepare for battle] All the crew were so excited about that scene when we shot it. They told us how cool it looked – you know, this line of Jedi turning on their lightsabers at the same time, all the different colours lighting up…

**RH:** Vernestra's lightsaber is purple, and she was able to alter it as a 16-year-old and turn it into a lightwhip.

**CB:** I have a yellow lightsaber. At first I really wanted to have a purple one. And I was given a different colour initially, but I can't say what because it relates to another character… And they took that one away and gave me a yellow one, and at first I was like, 'What? I've barely seen yellow used. What is this?!' But I think yellow represents balance, duality, a person who's just as much connected to the Force as to their own physical grounding.

**DK:** I broke three lightsabers. They were custom-sized to me, because I'm shorter than everyone else. My original saber was regular-sized, which was too long and kept hitting the ground. So they made me shorter ones. How did I feel when I broke my first one? I shat myself. I was like, 'I'm about to get fired.' Halfway through a take I whacked it and the LED light just died. I don't think it happened to anyone else, which… I don't know how I should feel about that [laughs].

**MJ:** Yes, I definitely had a lot of lightsaber envy. But at the end of the day, watching [the other actors] sweat and get sore every day from the training… I was like, 'You know what? I'm good with my drink and my sandwich!'

## BALANCE OF THE FORCE

**LH:** Honestly, the way I look at it is, there is no light without darkness. No good without bad. So to me – and this might just be a personal thing – the Force is about balance. It's not a Marvel superpower. [The Force-sensitive] aren't using telekinesis because they're special, powerful people; it's because they've achieved balance. As Yoda says, 'My ally is the Force.' So the idea of a separation from that was really interesting… If you are unbalanced, the Force cannot protect you.

**AS:** You know, I was surprised how much freedom I was given around what using the Force looked like to me. Of course, I referenced as much as I could that already exists [in previous films/shows]. But because we're in the High Republic era, things are more open. And as explored in many of the books, there's a large variety of Force-users, which allowed me to get creative.

DoP Chris Teague previously worked with Headland on *Russian Doll*

Dafne Keen as Jecki Lon, a Jedi Padawan



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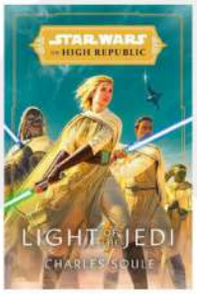
## JEDI HEIGHTS THE LOWDOWN ON THE HIGH REPUBLIC...

### THE CONCEPT

First teased (circa 2019) as 'Project Luminous', The High Republic (THR) is a multimedia, something-for-everyone sub-franchise set several centuries before the prequel era. Currently divided into three phases (Light of the Jedi, Quest of the Jedi, Trials of the Jedi), it focuses on the halcyon days of the Jedi Order, as it increases the peace throughout the Galactic Republic, typically while sporting big gold robes.

### THE COMICS

Alongside its regular Skywalker Saga titles, Marvel has been pumping out High Republic comics since 2021 that follow characters from the novels as well as a certain Jedi Grand Master who, no spoilers, rhymes with Skoda. There are ongoing series, miniseries (one exploring the origins of the Nihil and its dastardly boss, Marchion Ro) and a few manga titles, too.




### THE BOOKS

THR kicked off with Charles Soule's 2021 novel *Light of the Jedi*, which centres on the pivotal Great Disaster, a hyperspace calamity created by the big bads of the piece, the piratical Nihil. *Light...* spawned a trilogy, and the ball's been rolling since with books set before and after Phase I, YA and middle-grade novels, short stories and an *Art of* hardback.

### THE REST

Younglings' gateway to THR is 'toon show *Young Jedi Adventures* on Disney+/Junior, while gamers can check out *Jedi Survivor* and *Tales from Galaxy's Edge* (both featuring High Republic characters) while they wait to explore the era fully in the in-development *Star Wars: Eclipse*. There are also audio dramas... Struggling to keep up? Then seek out *The High Republic Show* on YouTube.

**DK:** We had weekly sessions of Force training with a movement coach. It was about learning the common language of how to use [the Force], but also finding the right movement for your character, because it's such a personal thing. I wasn't expecting it to be as difficult as it was, but it was also really fun. Every so often you'd come out of yourself and feel ridiculous. But it was great; we were all so invested, and we all really trusted Leslye. She was our bible. She was the boss.

## GRANDIOSE DESIGNS

**LH:** I was in such good hands with the people executing my vision for this show. We had a long pre-production phase, but we all clicked right away, especially cinematographer Chris [Teague] and me, as we'd already worked on *Russian Doll*. Chris and I talked a lot about honouring George Lucas' camera moves.

I would say the original trilogy became our touchpoint for how to craft the world, while the *Episode I*-ness of the show is a bit more thematic. The High Republic influenced the colour scheme and the costumes; our costume designer Jennifer L. Bryan really took inspiration from the Jedi designs.

**AS:** Jennifer and her team were so flexible and willing to do anything to make my costume as comfortable as possible. There were about eight different pieces, plus all these hidden elements that ensured I could squat if I needed to, or throw a hook, a backhand punch...

**RH:** I'm in some unbelievable Jedi robes. You don't have to have read the [High Republic] books to enjoy the show, but if you have then you know this is a kind of golden time for the Jedi and that their robes are lavish. And as an elder Jedi, Vernestra has some gorgeous, very heavy robes.

**CB:** Putting on the costume immediately made it so much easier for me to walk in every day. I will say that it was very tight, so I had to make sure I didn't eat too many Scotch eggs.

**MJ:** Qimir isn't the most fashionable person. I think he's spent a lot of his money eating at his home planet's cantina. His fashion sense is basically hobbit meets... poverty.

**DK:** Jecki is a Theelin, which made me feel very honoured because Theelins are Leslye's favourite aliens. All the prosthetics were really fun - although having horns can be dangerous, especially when you hug people.

**RH:** [The make-up] was really helpful in making me feel non-human. But sometimes I would forget and look in the mirror and be like, 'Oh my god! I'm fully green!' But I look great, I've got to say. I'm not Elphaba-in-*Wicked* green. I'm not the Hulk. She's like an earthy green, something you'd see in nature.

## PREQUELS, PRESTIGE, POWER

**AS:** We are the prequel to the prequels. And the prequels have this kind of prestige to them, this monarchical vibe. So one of my main questions going in was: are we going to maintain that sensibility? And yes, in many ways we do, while also incorporating elements that feel really contemporary and relatable. When I watched [the finished episodes] I was really struck by how universal the story was.

**RH:** I do think the show's about power. At this point in the High Republic, power is only used in a specific way. Who's allowed to use power? Who controls the power? Who makes those rules?

**DK:** I think trust is a big theme. Who do you trust? Who are the goodies and baddies? The show is really playing with those themes, because it's not so clear-cut.

**MJ:** Even though Star Wars has been pretty black and white in the past in terms of good guys and bad guys, I think with our show we'll get audiences really thinking about whether they resonate with the Light Side or the Dark Side.

**LH:** *The Acolyte* is a mystery. It's similar to *Russian Doll*, which was really about giving the audience information episode by episode, this spiral of storytelling. This is a much larger landscape, but it similarly tackles the idea of 'your eyes can deceive you'. You're going to think the show is one thing, but then it's going to gear-shift into something else, and then do it again.

It's a show packed with everything I wanted to explore: I wanted EU [Expanded Universe] stuff in there, references to the original trilogy, *The Phantom Menace*, the Disney sequels... it's absolutely packed. Because you never know, you may not get the chance again!

Stenberg found that filmed movements needed to be more expressive than in genuine martial arts

**STAR WARS: THE ACOLYTE STARTS ON DISNEY+ ON 5 JUNE.**

# TRUE CRIME ROM

# A NICE

Richard Linklater teams with Glen Powell and Adria Arjona for *Hit Man* – a raucous, sexy, dark comedy based on a stranger-than-fiction tale. *Total Film* goes undercover to talk demythologising hitmen, multi-dimensional female characters and the resurgence of the Hollywood leading man.

**WORDS** **LEILA LATIF**

Ritchie Montgomery appears alongside co-writer Glen Powell

Certain things only exist on the silver screen. Explosive car crashes where heroes walk away without so much as a sore neck; romcom protagonists waking up from a night of passion with perfect hair; academics who fight the forces of evil in their downtime, rather than marking homework. But even if we know to watch films with a heavy pinch of salt, the team behind *Hit Man* have been met with shock, confusion and even disappointment when audiences learn that, unlike in the movies… hitmen don't really exist.

The dark comedy from Richard Linklater – co-written by and starring Glen Powell alongside Adria Arjona – bills itself as 'a somewhat true story', based on a 2001 *Texas Monthly* article by Skip Hollandsworth (co-writer of Linklater's *Bernie*) about how an unassuming man called Gary Johnson became Houston's most sought-after professional killer. But Johnson worked for the police, who would rush in and arrest those who 'hired' him.

The existence of hitmen that can be called to take out an annoying co-worker or a loathed ex may seem plausible as they're so culturally ubiquitous but… Think about it. Why would anyone risk the electric chair for a relatively small payout from a stranger? And if hitmen were advertising their services to the general public, wouldn't the authorities have noticed?

Linklater – the celebrated director of *Boyhood*, *School of Rock* and the Before trilogy – has had the existence (or lack thereof) of hitmen on his mind for years. 'I've been fascinated with this for decades. I read true crime and I remember even buying "How to be a Hitman" and these manuals written by Southern California housewives, but it's all bullshit!' he laughs. 'When I read Skip's article, I remember calling to ask him and he goes, "There's no record ever of a hitman at this level." Rationally, of course there isn't.'

Linklater admits many people 'feel duped', like they are hearing the tooth fairy isn't real, but as the director points out: 'We should all be super relieved that there aren't real hitmen, shouldn't we? That your sworn enemy can't win the lottery and, just as a side note, bump you off for something you said 20 years ago. It's really good news there's not that.'

His co-writer Powell stars as Gary, the titular 'hitman' who is not actually a hitman, but a mild-mannered divorcee and professor who moonlights with law enforcement to entrap people who haven't twigged that, as the actor puts it, 'in modern times, it can't exist. You theoretically have people being taken out by Russia or the Mafia, but a retail hitman is an illusion, and Gary taps into the fun of the illusion.' However, as Powell's co-star Arjona says, letting go of the idea of hitmen existing

Linklater's process allowed lots of input from his leads



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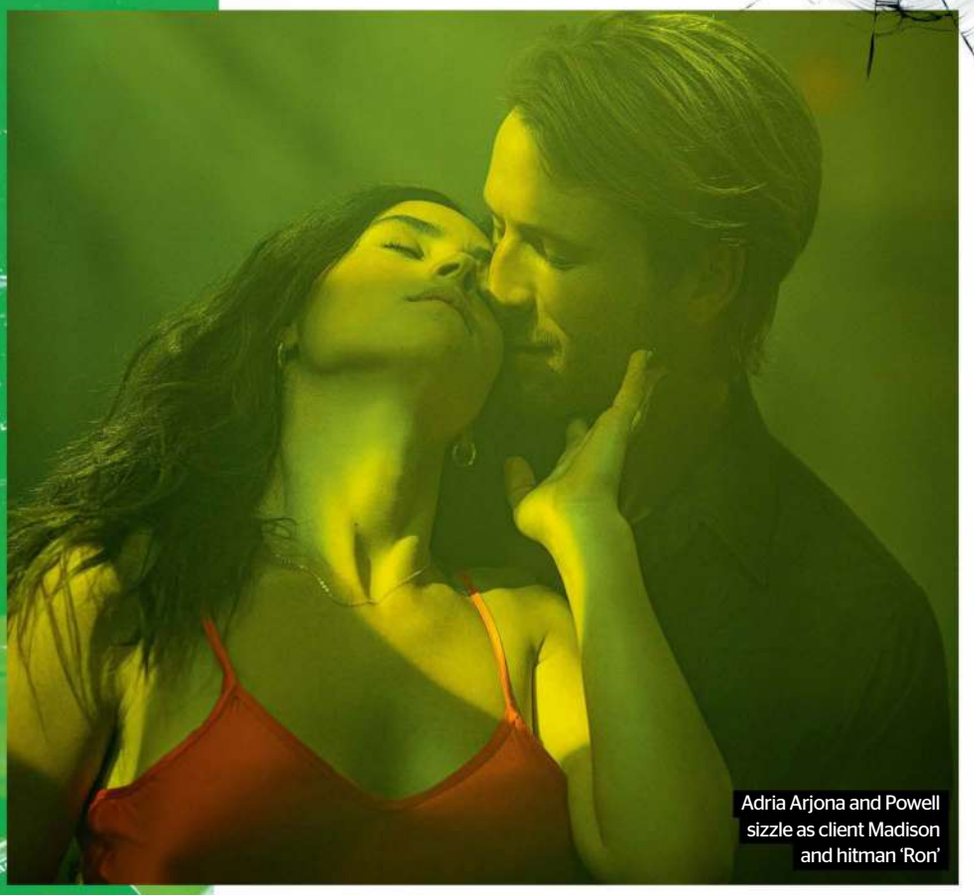

Adria Arjona and Powell sizzle as client Madison and hitman 'Ron'

## 'WE SHOULD ALL BE SUPER RELIEVED THERE AREN'T REAL HITMEN'

RICHARD LINKLATER

means confronting the idea that 'if you want to do bad things, you gotta do it yourself'.

Arjona's character, Madison, is not doing a 'bad thing' per se when she hires Gary to take out her abusive husband. However, by the time she is introduced to the story, Gary has his entrapment skills down to a fine art, transforming into a local assassin tailored to each client's desires, be it a slick sharp-suited killer, a bandana-wearing gun nut with neck tattoos, or a bespectacled nerd with an Eastern European lilt. For Madison, he becomes 'Ron', a suave knight in shining armour who, unlike the sweet but awkward Gary, is ludicrously sexy. Before long, Madison and Ron are head over heels for one another, and Gary has to do whatever he can to protect her from her ex and his own sting operation.

Watching Powell and Arjona sizzle on screen and land Hepburn/Tracy-style zingers is pure cinematic dopamine, but the layers of profundity that slowly reveal themselves make this unpredictable tale one for the ages. Gary's journey to becoming Ron isn't just him assuming a new costume. It's a new layer of skin.

Linklater's films speak to universal themes around childhood, parenthood, love and community, and he explains that they 'aren't about extraordinary people. I'm often just taking something out of my own life, and drawing something out of personal experience to see if there is something meaningful or funny, and just trying to find the depth.'

While *Hit Man* might be one of his wilder premises (despite being based on a true story), Linklater is fundamentally still seeking that same depth; through Gary, the film asks about where the boundaries of honesty and self-actualisation lie. Farcical as the many twists and turns may be, there is universal truth in Gary's extremely specific set of problems.

### MASTER OF DISGUISE

The parallel between Gary's professional subterfuge and Powell's on-screen transformations wasn't lost on the white-hot star. 'It's a version of dating, of Hollywood, of how we all operate on half-truth when you're trying to put your best foot forward.' So whether, in Powell's case, that meant pretending to be a much better baseball player than he was when he auditioned for Linklater's *Everybody Wants Some!!* or being as enchanting as possible during his early romances, he says that when 'Rick and I were baking this, what made us laugh and what felt universal is that we could all be better versions of ourselves if we only just really committed to it.'

Powell, so charming talking to *TF* it's as if he has used his *Hit Man* skills to transform into a custom-made dream interviewee, peppers in compliments between thoughtful answers (yes, flattery will get you everywhere with *TF*). He has hyper-engaged movie-star quality and versatility that makes him feel like a modern-day Spencer Tracy, which was first spotted by Linklater when he cast him in *Fast Food Nation* as a teenager. The director recalls: 'Hundreds of kids audition for even small parts like this, but Glen had something interesting. He had "it" even then.' Having starred in hits like *Top Gun: Maverick*, *Hidden Figures* and *Anyone But You*, and now set to follow up *Hit Man* with Lee Isaac Chung's *Twisters*, Powell has – says Linklater – proved himself as an 'old-school leading man. He is what Hollywood used to be looking for, and if anyone doubts that, this film shows Glen can do anything.'

Arjona is equally effusive about Powell and Linklater, referring to them as 'my southern gentlemen'. But the paths of these two gentlemen have parallels outside of their four collaborations, both unwilling to be boxed into a single genre. Hollywood is famously risk-averse and once a filmmaker or actor successfully pulls off one thing, it demands more of the same. But the last decade has

seen Powell and Linklater make comedies, romances, documentaries, action films, coming-of-age tales and innovative animations. For Powell, he puts it down to finally having 'the political capital and the ability to get the movies I want made'.

Having come of age as a movie fan in the 90s in Austin, where Linklater was one of his heroes, Powell 'watched every romcom that has ever existed with my mom and sisters. I got to put all of my love of that genre into this and play in that sandbox. I loved *Top Gun*, and *Twister* was one of the most defining movies of my childhood.' Powell nearly went into finance ('I just thought having a job meant working with numbers') but instead fulfilled his childhood dreams by making 'a run of movies that would personally get me into the theatre'.

Linklater is similarly unconcerned about replicating past success. 'I've never been "in" Hollywood,' he claims, having always been based in Austin, Texas. 'I don't really have an employer. I just do whatever I'm obsessed with at the moment.' Even after all the acclaim of *Boyhood*, which was robbed of the Best Picture Oscar (something, Linklater says, *TF* seems to be much more bothered by than he ever was), he asks: 'How could I replicate it? What genre was *Boyhood* even in?'

## '[LINKLATER] GIVES US A VOICE, WHICH WE DON'T GET ALL THE TIME'

**ADRIA ARJONA**

After his break-out films *Slacker* and *Dazed and Confused*, Linklater moved on to *Before Sunrise*, the stunningly romantic piece starring Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy about two people falling in love over a single night in Vienna. 'Looking back, that was a moment I could have done any big Hollywood film,' the Oscar-nominated director says. 'I was approached by every studio after *Dazed*. But I used that opportunity to make this intimate, much smaller film that no one might ever let me make again. Just two people talking all night.'

## MADISON AVENUE

One thing that also emerged out of *Dazed and Confused* was a commitment to writing dynamic and complicated women, which carries into *Hit Man* with Arjona's Madison. Gary may deceive her, but Madison isn't a two-dimensional femme fatale, nor a damsel in distress – she has far more tricks up her sleeve, and Arjona brings an emotional rawness and comedic chops that make her the perfect foil to Powell. It is the type of female character Linklater committed to because 'I felt the teenage boys overrode *Dazed*,' he admits. 'I underachieved with what I wanted to capture with the female characters. I was kind of hard on myself and

Glen Powell's role permits him to combine his star power with being a chameleon

*Before Sunrise* was my way to try to have a really strong female voice.'

That commitment has remained ever since, with the director explaining, 'I really am striving for equal. In *Hit Man* you do see Madison absolutely through [Gary's] point of view, because that is the structure there, so it can't be like *Before* where its 50/50, or female-led [films] like *Where'd You Go, Bernadette*, so its hard to pull off sometimes but it's my effort and Adria is incredible.'

Given that so many of his films have semi-autobiographical elements, the impact of the women in his life influences his films' perspectives. He explains: 'I'm blessed that my mom was a very strong, independent woman. My new documentary, *God Save Texas* on HBO, featured my mom, who passed away almost

Powell in disguise and Richard Robichaux as Joe

Cops Jasper (Austin Amelio), Phil (Sanjay Rao) and Claudette (Retta)

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## INCOGNITO MODE The on-screen disguises so bad they're good.

### SOME LIKE IT HOT (1959)

Billy Wilder's classic sees two men on the run posing as women to join an all-female band. Not only do Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon make pretty gorgeous-looking gals, but there's no better disguise than situating yourself next to the divine charisma of Marilyn Monroe. Who's going to be looking at you, anyhow?

### SUPERMAN (1978)

Technically it's just glasses, but in the hands of the late, great Christopher Reeve, it's genius. Superman and Clark Kent are both 6ft 4in, chiselled figures who have never been seen in the same room together, but Reeve makes them feel so molecularly distinct you can't blame people for not catching on.

### COMING TO AMERICA (1988)

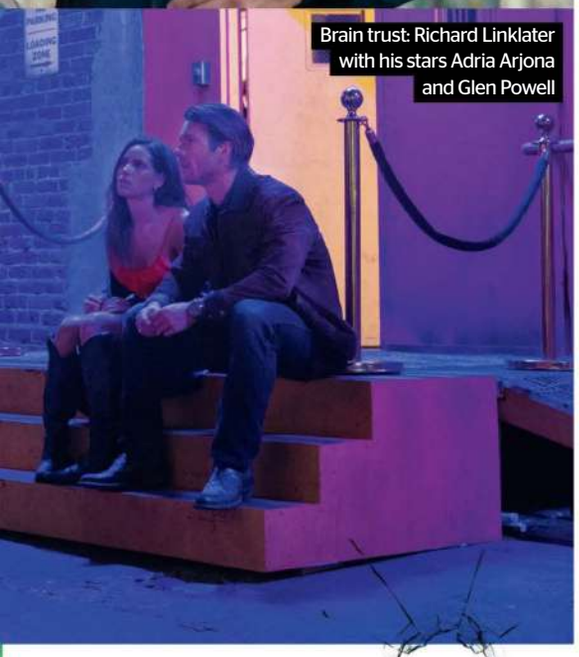
The disguise in Eddie Murphy's classic comedy is Prince Akeem pretending to be a broke immigrant, but the actor also disappears into Randy Watson, Saul and Clarence. While some of the film's humour hasn't aged brilliantly, Murphy never concealed that leading-man charm – he is a wonderfully silly chameleon.

### MULAN (1998)

Sometimes, a haircut can change your life, but in the case of adventurous young Mulan, it saves a nation. To defeat the Hun invasion, Mulan (voiced by Ming-Na Wen) takes her elderly father's place. Her makeover is simple: a bob and some bandages do most of the work, but she transforms into a true warrior.

### FOUR LIONS (2010)

No one expected that anyone, not even *Brass Eye*'s Chris Morris, could make suicide bombing funny, but Riz Ahmed's star-making turn is as hilarious as it is heartbreaking. The climax involves men with explosives disguised as a Ninja Turtle, an ostrich and a upside-down clown, while Ahmed acts his heart out in a Honey Monster costume. **LL**



Brain trust: Richard Linklater with his stars Adria Arjona and Glen Powell

seven years ago, her legacy and her activism on prison. So I had a strong-minded, independent, cool mom, sisters and grandmothers around me, and I viewed the world through that.'

That respect for the female experience does not only mean that Linklater's work has led to glittering awards for Patricia Arquette and Julie Delpy, but meant that Arjona – best known for *6 Underground*, *Morbius* and *Andor* – was integral to building and enriching Madison. Arjona describes how Linklater 'allows space for the actress to have a voice at the table. I very much was involved with the development of every single scene. When I first got the script, Madison was a skeleton and he allowed me to sit down and create her with him. The women in his films are genuine and honest because it's coming from them. He gives us a voice, which we don't necessarily get all the time.' Arjona remembers being surprised how much agency she was given when 'the first time he asked me, "Oh, can you write that line on my computer?" I was like, "What?" I've never been given that space, and that's why his female characters really pop.'

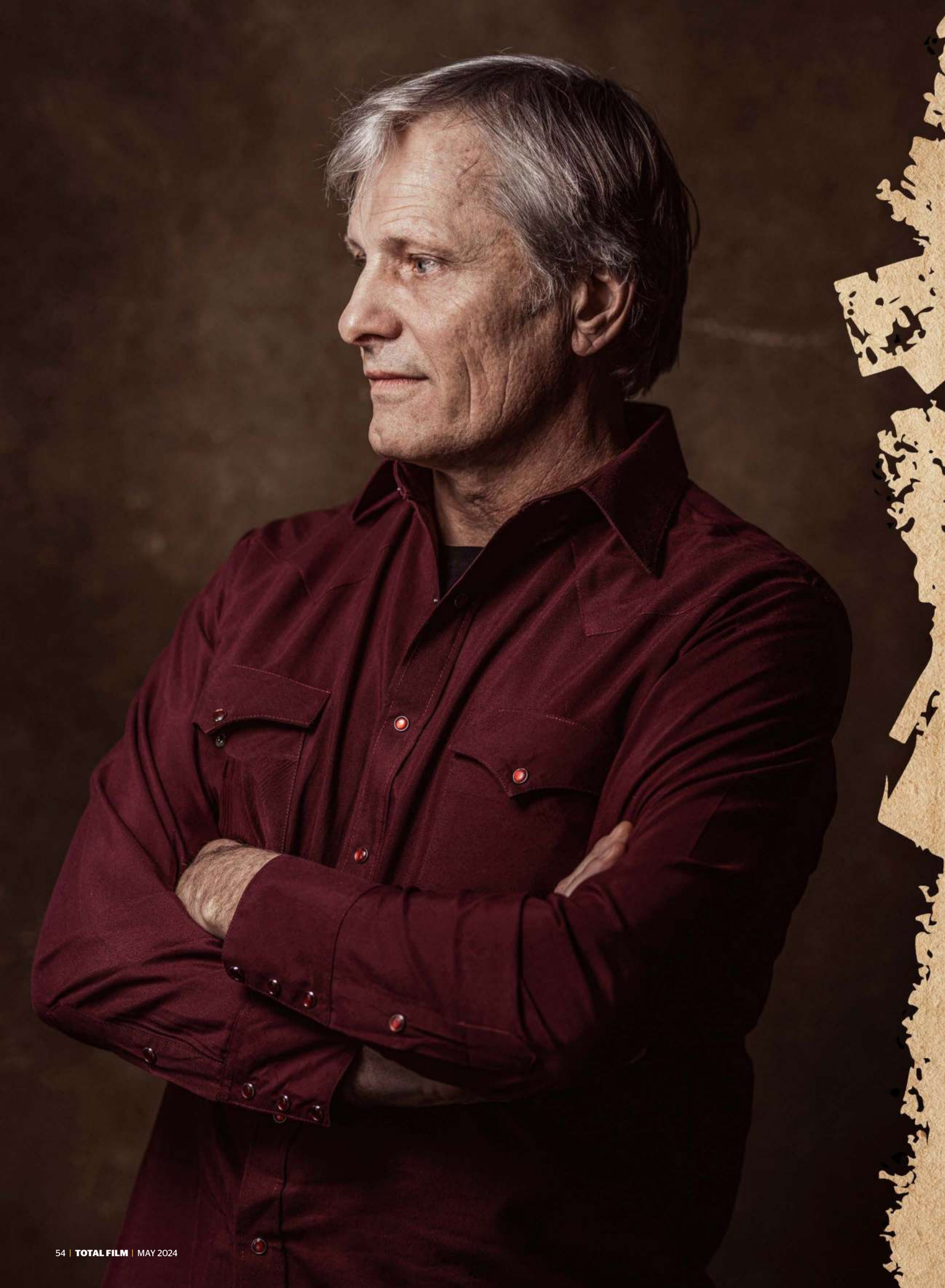
Madison also 'pops' thanks to Arjona's wicked comic timing and the emotional weight placed on her devastating backstory that pushes her into hiring who she believes to be a contract killer. But the film requires that dynamic between Gary/Ron and Madison to sizzle. Upon Powell and Arjona's first meeting, it was clear that the pair had chemistry, with Arjona recalling, 'We went to lunch and we were both doing Dry January… That lasted about 20 minutes. And we were there having drinks for five hours and Rick kept calling and being like, "Are you guys still there?!" We just hit it off and had so many ideas on bringing this relationship and the complexities to life. Our sober January ended but we started to work from the second we sat down in front of each other.'

But given this was a January after most of the world had just come out of the umpteenth lockdown, it's more than understandable why a fun five-hour lunch would be tempting. The film itself was born of COVID-19, as Powell says. 'Rick and I were breaking the story down during the pandemic. No matter where you were in your life, everybody was having sort of the same existential crisis because the pandemic caused you to be stuck with yourself.' While Powell sat at home, unable to act, hearing about *Top Gun: Maverick* being delayed yet again, he worked on the *Hit Man* script and Linklater and he 'were talking about people picking up a canvas. People tried new hobbies, people got divorced and people found love. I think that is a very interesting feeling that's in the film. That it's never too late to become the person that you want to be.'

But once the lockdowns were over, more trouble lay ahead with an actors' strike, meaning that Powell and Arjona couldn't attend the film's glitzy Venice Film Festival premiere and see the jubilant standing ovation that erupted when the credits rolled. Arjona admits to being 'really jealous' that *TF* got to be in attendance as she's only been able to see the film on her sofa 'eating chocolates under a blanket with my mom' and hear reports from Linklater on how much the crowds are loving it.

Powell sadly lists missing out on 'Venice, Toronto, London and New York. I got to finally see it with an audience at Sundance.' The film was scooped up by Netflix and is now among the most anticipated films of 2024. Hitmen might not be real, but great Richard Linklater movies sure as hell are.

**HIT MAN STREAMS ON NETFLIX FROM 7 JUNE.**



# STRAIGHT SHOOTER

**Viggo Mortensen** is riding high with ***The Dead Don't Hurt***, a revisionist western that sees him write, direct, produce, score and star alongside an awards-worthy Vicky Krieps. *Total Film* saddles up with the no-nonsense multi-hyphenate to discuss how he wipes the dust off the Old West to focus on women, immigrants and a tender love story...

**WORDS: JAMIE GRAHAM PORTRAIT: VLAD VDK**

VLAD VDK/FRONTDUK/GETTY IMAGES

Viggo Mortensen is in good spirits. Last night, his second film as director, *The Dead Don't Hurt*, played to a standing ovation at the Glasgow Film Festival, and today the 65-year-old star, always a calm, modest man, admits to being 'very happy with the reception'. His back is turned as he walks around his hotel suite twiddling at the window blinds to moderate the sun, but his smile can be heard in his voice. Another twiddle. When he finally sits down to face *Total Film*, his handsome features are dramatically swathed in shadow.

'I actually wasn't trying to reinvent the western; I wanted to be respectful of something that I admire, which is the well-made, classic western,' he explains of the revisionist *The Dead Don't Hurt*. Set in an 1860s frontier community in Nevada, the understated story focuses on the burgeoning romantic relationship between two immigrants, the fiercely independent French-Canadian Vivienne Le Coudy, played by Vicky Krieps, and Danish carpenter Holger, played by Mortensen himself. 'But I grant you,' he continues, 'the one subversive or unusual thing is that, yes, it has a female character at the centre, and a love story is central to what the movie is about.' He muses. 'I guess, most importantly, when Vivienne's male companion goes away [to fight in the Civil War], we don't see him for quite some time. We stay with her, which is completely unusual for a classic western.'

It's unusual for modern westerns, too. 'I mean, even [in] newer westerns, whether they be *The Hateful Eight* or *The Power of the Dog*, female characters are secondary,' he says. 'They're not really fleshed-out. It is very unusual, for some reason, even in our times, to have it be about the women. I would say that Kelly Reichardt [*Meek's Cutoff*, *First Cow*] is more attentive to women than these other guys.'

> 'I'VE ALWAYS LIKED TO BE AROUND SETS EVEN ON THE DAYS I'M NOT WORKING, JUST TO SEE WHAT THEY'RE DOING'
> VIGGO MORTENSEN

Mortensen didn't cynically set out to make a feminist western as a point of difference, but instead started writing a tale about a girl, which he organically followed to discover who she became as a woman. It was a novelistic approach, inspired by some of the storytelling in modern-day TV series, which enjoy the luxury of allowing stories to unfold in unforced and often non-linear style to better explore the characters. And so he arrived at a woman of modest means who refuses to let her status or sex reduce her, and who is unbroken by the terrible events that befall her in the movie. It was crucial that Mortensen now find the right person to play Vivienne.

Enter Luxembourg-born actor Vicky Krieps, who Paul Thomas Anderson cast in *Phantom Thread* because she neither shrank nor dropped her eye when she first met acting legend Daniel Day-Lewis, but greeted him as an equal.

'Yeah, I can believe that,' says Mortensen, the shadows shifting as the corners of his mouth curl upwards. 'She really has a strong sense of herself, like the character she plays. She's a free human being in that she thinks for herself and is self-sufficient. Once she commits to something in terms of acting… Even if it's not the perfect take, it's never false. I can't imagine anyone doing what she did with it, really, and believably playing someone where I look at the screen and I see every detail. She's completely a woman from that time, and I believe her 100% in what she's going through, and every second of her performance.'

Atlas Green plays young son Vincent in his feature debut

Vicky Krieps is the independent Vivienne Le Coudy

## GO WEST

Born in New York City to a Danish father and American mother, Mortensen was raised in Venezuela and Argentina, where his father managed ranches. His parents divorced when he was 11, his mother taking him and his two younger brothers back to the state of New York. The peripatetic lifestyle didn't stop there. Upon graduating St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York, he moved to Denmark and wrote short stories and poetry while working odd jobs, and then upped sticks to again return to New York, this time tending tables and bars while taking acting lessons. Next stop, Los Angeles.

Mortensen's film debut was a small part as an Amish farmer in Peter Weir's sombre thriller *Witness* (1985), and gigs of varying sizes followed in movies as diverse as *Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III*, *Carlito's Way*, *Crimson Tide*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *G.I. Jane* and Gus

SIGNATURE ENTERTAINMENT



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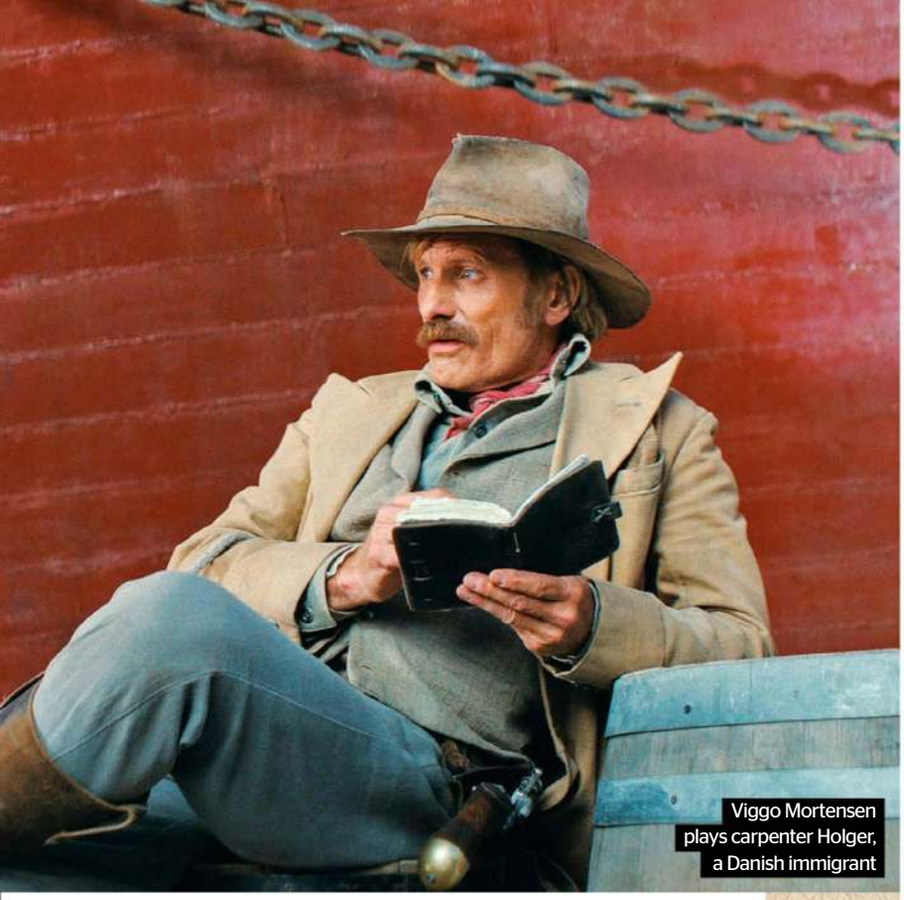

Viggo Mortensen plays carpenter Holger, a Danish immigrant

Van Sant's *Psycho* remake. Then, in 1999, he was approached to play royal ranger Aragorn in Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings trilogy, a role he took primarily because his son, a fan of J.R.R. Tolkien's source books, urged him to. Mortensen was crowned with stardom.

But stardom was never his desire. Swiftly he turned down a chance to be in The Hobbit movies ('One of the producers did ask if I would be interested,' he explained in 2013. 'I said, "You do know, don't you, that Aragorn isn't in *The Hobbit*? That there is a 60-year gap between the books?"'), and his work since – films like *The Road*, *Captain Fantastic* and *Green Book*, plus David Cronenberg movies *A History of Violence*, *Eastern Promises* and *Crimes of the Future* – has consciously repositioned him as a character actor. Meanwhile, international productions *Everybody Has a Plan*, *Jauja*, *Far from Men* and *Eureka* have evidenced an experimental yen.

There was, however, one constant during his journeying through this varied body of work: he was never satisfied with simply being an actor. 'From the beginning, I've been interested in the storytelling aspect, and hence the collective enterprise,' he points out. 'I've always liked to be around sets even on the days I'm not working, just to see what they're doing. My film school has been film shoots.'

The couple's lives are complicated when Holger leaves to fight in the Civil War

Mortensen made his writer/director debut with 2020's *Falling*, an affecting drama about the relationship between a cantankerous, aged father (Lance Henriksen) suffering from dementia and his gay middle-aged son (Mortensen). It was a deeply personal work, Mortensen having lost his own dad to dementia.

'For better or worse, I want to make a movie that I'd like to go see,' he says of ensuring that the subject matter chimes. 'When the director is not allowed to make the movie they want to make, it's never as good as it might have been. Or as interesting, or as original, in any case. I could not think, "OK, I want to meet all the demographics. I want to please everyone. I'll put in voiceover. I'll put in, 'San Francisco, 1869.' I'll make sure everybody understands every single bit, and it'll appeal to every racial, sexual profile of an audience." I understand when huge-budget movies do that, because there's a lot at stake, investment-wise, but it's not a recipe for making memorable, original movies.'

## OLD SCHOOL

Mortensen has learned this from the filmmakers he has worked with over the years, along with how to stay calm and best communicate with cast and crew. Cronenberg, Jane Campion and Ron Howard are names he cites. When asked what he learned from Jackson on Lord of the Rings, he says: 'Problem-solving. It was like a giant, mobile film school. It was fantastic to be able to run over to one soundstage as they built Rivendell, sculpting, painting, adding trees, or to drop by Helm's Deep. And just seeing Peter Jackson solve logistical filmmaking problems on the fly, out in nature, depending on the weather…' He ponders. 'And inspiring a large number of people. The crew was large and mostly Kiwis, and not all of them that experienced. But they learned. It was film school for everyone. I don't know how he did it. It was one man commanding this giant, floating circus.'

Mortensen not only wrote, directed and starred in *The Dead Don't Hurt*, but also produced and composed the strikingly plaintive score. It's some achievement, though he's quick to point out that plenty of suggestions from many other skilled people helped him to fashion the film. That he encouraged all voices is fitting given one of the key themes in *The Dead Don't Hurt*.

'People came from lots of places,' says Mortensen, pointing out how the town in his movie is a melting pot of ethnicities, while many classic westerns focus on white cowboys. 'You know, 12 or 13 years earlier, that part of the country was Mexico. In 1848, the United States took basically a third of Mexico away. So the population is a mix of Anglos and the Latino population.'

Right now, Mortensen points out, there is huge division in not just the United States and the UK, but in Spain, France, Hungary, Poland… 'It's everywhere. It's not really a national thing, it's a human thing. It's the fear of the other. And the political use or incitement of the fear of the other, to get power, and keep it, and control populations.' So while he didn't write *The Dead Don't Hurt* 'to make a comment about now', he's pleased that it resonates. 'It's unrealistic what the extreme right tries to do in France or Britain or the US or even in Canada. "England for the English" – what the hell does that mean?'

Mortensen is a man with plenty to say, and with many stories to tell. 'I just hope,' he says, again pushing back the shadows with his thoughtful smile, 'that enough people go see this one so that those who have the money will trust me with another new story.'

**THE DEAD DON'T HURT OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 7 JUNE.**

Benedict Cumberbatch goes back to the 80s for Netflix series *Eric*, which features his strangest co-star to date: a massive man-in-a-suit puppet representing his character's personal demons. *Total Film* hears from the cast and creators behind what is perhaps the most unusual New York crime drama ever to hit TV.

WORDS **JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**

# SHADOWY PUPPET

In 1980s New York, the creator of a popular puppet-based children's TV show, *Good Day Sunshine*, grapples with the disappearance of his nine-year-old son, while his already strained marriage falls apart. Meanwhile, the detective in charge of this missing-person case uncovers a wave of corruption, and struggles with his secret life as a gay man against the backdrop of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Oh, and that dad whose child is missing? He starts hallucinating the presence of a giant monster puppet that follows him around the city.

'It's not an obvious recipe, is it?' *Total Film* is speaking to writer and showrunner Abi Morgan about *Eric*, her peculiar new limited series for Netflix. The Emmy and BAFTA-winning writer of shows *The Hour*, *The Split* and *River*, as well as Steve McQueen's film *Shame*, Morgan excitingly blends gritty naturalism with fantastical fable in her latest project.

Benedict Cumberbatch stars as both the puppeteer, Vincent Anderson, and the voice of the creature, Eric, that starts appearing in his delusions. *Transparent* star Gaby Hoffmann is his long-suffering wife, Cassie; screen newcomer Ivan Morris Howe plays Edgar, their seemingly abducted son; and the compelling McKinley Belcher III (*Ozark*) is Michael Ledroit, the detective put under pressure by his superiors after they realise that the missing Edgar



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Benedict Cumberbatch plays Vincent, with Ivan Morris Howe as his son Edgar

is the grandson of a powerful local tycoon (*The Wire*'s John Doman).

Morgan breaks down her initial pitch to Netflix for us: 'It's about a father who goes on a search to find his missing son, accompanied by a seven-foot-four blue puppet who's come to help him and is discovered within the drawings that his son's left behind. And the reason why I want to set it in the mid-80s is I want to look at the idea of how a case like that was dealt with at the time.

'That opened up all the various elements of the NYPD and City Hall. And then, as I went deeper into that, I started to look at this incredible disparity between the Fifth Avenue and Wall Street affluence of New York and then this huge subculture of lower-income families affected by gentrification. And when I started to think about all those themes, I thought, they're as resonant today as they were 40 years ago. I thought it was a really good way of looking at the present by looking at the past.'

Speaking on that examination of the time period and specific New York setting, Benedict Cumberbatch describes *Eric* as a truly distinctive exploration of the era. 'The amalgamation of this cross-section of that time – the people, the society and the culture of it all – is pretty unique,' he says. 'Abi's sewn them all together into this extraordinary tapestry that's resonant with things we know but is utterly its own creation – it's pretty special.'

Welsh-born Morgan spent some of the 1980s living in New York, though further inspiration for *Eric* stemmed from a childhood as the daughter of a theatre director. 'I grew up in a world of sets,' she says. 'And that's what made me latch onto this idea of creative geniuses who are actually chaotic in their personal and home life. What I became fascinated by in the character of Vincent was that he is this brilliant creative mastermind on America's leading puppet show by day, but at night his marriage is falling apart and it's about this relationship with his son. I also wanted to explore legacy, male toxicity and the things we inherit from our fathers.'

> 'I wanted to explore legacy, male toxicity and the things we inherit from our fathers'
>
> **ABI MORGAN**

Vincent is a puppet show creator by day – but they've never followed him around before...

As the show goes on, you start to understand where Eric has come from. Before his disappearance, Edgar is drawing this imagined friend, but you realise that the boy has been absorbing every little detail of his fraught living situation when creating the character and his backstory. 'The swish of the tail is meant to feel like Edgar's cat,' says Morgan, 'and with the voice, which is born from Vincent himself, Vincent comes to see that he has his own part to play in the creation of Eric; literally, but also emotionally in the way that Edgar perceived him.' In many ways, Vincent is difficult, self-centred and a narcissist. But in other ways, we're also watching a man evolving and starting to understand himself through this journey to find his child. He becomes convinced that if he can get a built version of Eric onto TV, then Edgar will see it and return home.

Vincent's wife (and the missing Edgar's mother) is played by Gaby Hoffmann

## MASTERS OF PUPPETS

*Fraggle Rock*. *The Dark Crystal*. *The Great Muppet Caper*. *Labyrinth*. Peter Jackson's *Meet the Feebles*. The 1980s was arguably the golden age of puppet-based media, which presented challenges for the *Eric* team to design entirely original creations that could feel authentic in the period setting.

'When we were designing what the puppets should be,' says series director Lucy Forbes (*This is Going to Hurt*), 'we're thinking about certain animals and things. Jim Henson's Creature Shop has created thousands and thousands of puppets. It was incredibly difficult to find a world that they hadn't touched, which we eventually did.

LUDOVIC ROBERT. NETFLIX



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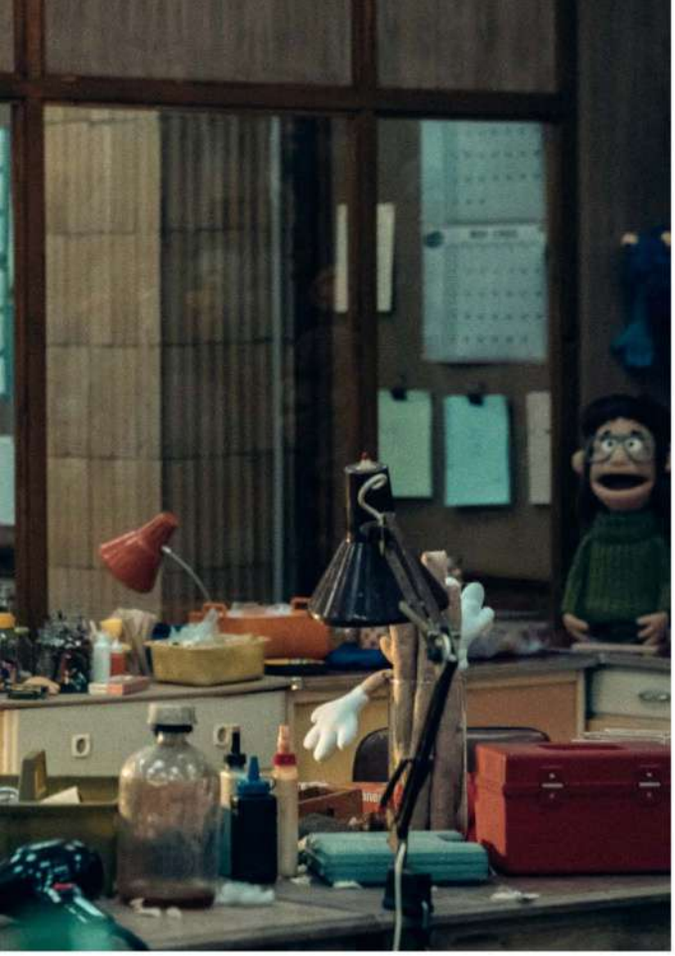


McKinley Belcher III is gay detective Ledroit

But the really interesting thing is how they were made. We didn't want anything to feel like it didn't belong in the period. There's this certain type of puppet material they don't make any more, and Stitches and Glue – [the company] who created all our puppets – found some in the back of a warehouse. There were only two rolls left and we were incredibly lucky to be able to use them.

'The big thing for me,' continues Forbes, 'was that the design of Eric had to straddle both environments. He had to belong on the streets of New York but also fit in *Good Day Sunshine*'s world. If we'd just made him a bright blue puppet, I think he would've been an eyesore. Eric is [inherently] an enormous rug pull. It needed to be a rug pull, but not so much that it just makes people turn off because he doesn't fit into the environment. Colour palette was really important, and designing him in a way where we can dirty him up as he goes along.'

Cumberbatch describes his hallucinated scene partner as 'a mood-shifting entity. He can be everything from the foul-mouth buddy to the thing that can say the things we can't. He's an enabler at one point. He's a protector, a shadow-self, a friend. He's a needy partner. He's a sage in a way, a spirit guide.' Based on what Gaby Hoffmann tells us, the Eric puppet was quite an overwhelming presence. 'It was truly startling when I walked on set the first time and encountered Eric,' she says. 'I started to cry. He really touches on something true. I'm so curious to see how people respond.'

Before her early days as a child star in *Field of Dreams* and more, Hoffmann grew up in the Manhattan neighbourhood that *Eric* takes place in, living in the famous Chelsea Hotel during the 1980s. 'There was a real rawness to the city that I actually miss very much,' she tells us with a laugh. 'It's been washed away by corporate culture to some extent.' Related to those changes, *Eric* ended up being filmed primarily in New Jersey and Budapest. Hoffmann describes the latter as having 'this dark, beautiful but almost neglected feeling in parts of it. And that was very much the feeling of especially downtown New York in the 80s.'

'The better he gets at doing his job, the more his personal life unravels'

**McKINLEY BELCHER III**

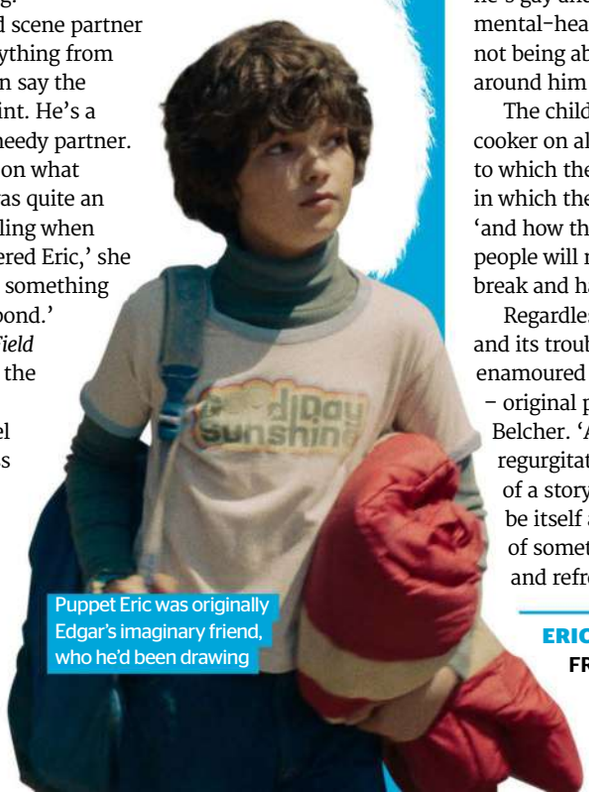
'The show does a really great job of capturing the rhythm of New York City,' McKinley Belcher III tells *TF*. 'The energy that can be both exhilarating and exhausting.' Belcher's co-lead part as wearied Detective Ledroit is – if you'll excuse the puppet pun – one of the most deeply felt emotional elements of the series. 'As he starts to put the pieces together more, he realises how flawed the system is,' Belcher says. 'And the better he gets at doing his job, the more his personal life unravels.

'What was most important to me is that he starts the show with his queerness being very much a thing that is hidden; he is afraid of it being discovered and it being weaponised in a way that would be detrimental. His journey is coming to terms with both his Blackness and his queerness, and understanding that that's his superpower; that's what makes him different and gives him a window into a kind of empathy and a point of view that means he is the [right] person for this job.'

'I think these are two men in search of a place in a world that is stacked against them,' says Cumberbatch of both Ledroit and Vincent. '[Ledroit] societally, because he's gay and he's Black, and [Vincent] because of the mental-health issue, it not being understood, and him not being able to function without destroying those around him who are supposedly helping.'

The child going missing seemingly acts as a pressure cooker on all these people's lives, exposing the degrees to which they're flawed and broken. 'It reveals the ways in which they personally need to change,' says Belcher, 'and how the world around them needs to change. Some people will rise to that mandate and other people will break and have an inability to step into that change.'

Regardless of how audiences end up receiving *Eric* and its troubled characters, all the talent involved seem enamoured with this multifaceted, odd and – crucially – original production. 'It's beautifully weird,' says Belcher. 'And in a world where so much IP is being regurgitated and recycled, to witness and be a part of a story that is truly unique, and is bold enough to be itself and to not have to stand on the shoulders of something that existed before, is really exciting and refreshing.'



Puppet Eric was originally Edgar's imaginary friend, who he'd been drawing

**ERIC PREMIERES GLOBALLY ON NETFLIX FROM 30 MAY.**

## TF LIST

# COVERED

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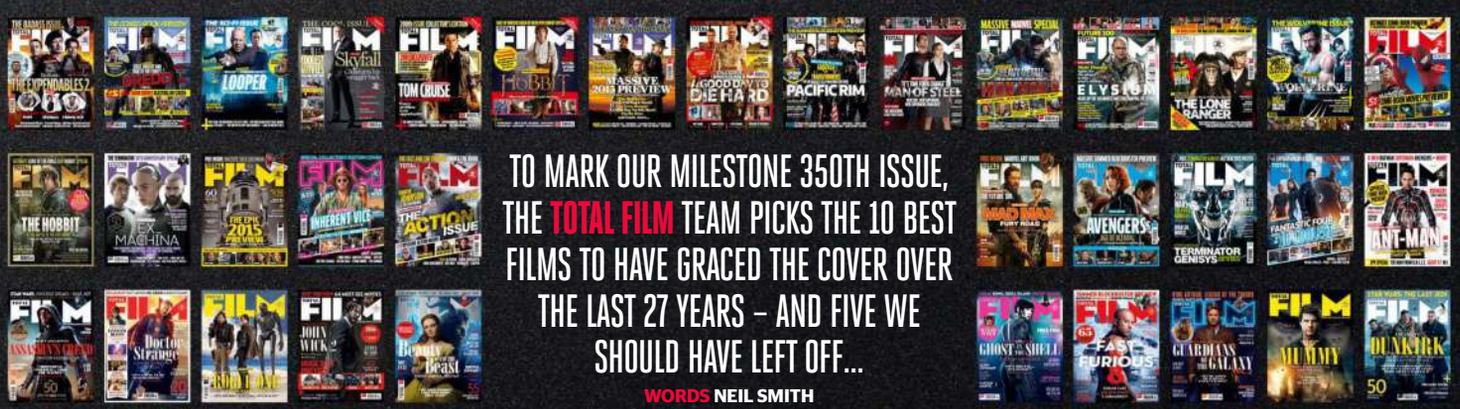
# IN GLORY




TO MARK OUR MILESTONE 350TH ISSUE, THE **TOTAL FILM** TEAM PICKS THE 10 BEST FILMS TO HAVE GRACED THE COVER OVER THE LAST 27 YEARS – AND FIVE WE SHOULD HAVE LEFT OFF...

**WORDS** NEIL SMITH

We don't turn 350 every month, and reaching that not insignificant milestone has got us looking back over our previous issues to select the best (and worst!) films we have featured on our cover. Before making our choices, though, we decided to set a few ground rules. No director would be allowed to have more than one film in our countdowns (not even you, Sir Christopher!); we turfed out year/decade-in-review editions; and we omitted films that didn't debut within our 27-year life span. Got that? Fab. All we need now are 350 candles and a whopping big cake…

AL AMY

## JACKIE BROWN
### ISSUE 15, APRIL 1998

*Total Film* was only 15 issues old when Quentin Tarantino's classy and mature adap of Elmore Leonard's *Rum Punch* took over our cover, with blaxploitation icon Pam Grier striking a distinctly Bond-ish pose as its resourceful flight-attendant heroine. And while our team had just as much love for Tarantino's next opus, *Kill Bill* (issue 82, November 2003), in the end our 'one film per director' rule meant we absolutely, positively could accept no substitutes. All these years later, it still tickles us how Michael Keaton's Ray Nicolette was able to flit between this film and Steven Soderbergh's contemporaneous Leonard yarn *Out of Sight*.

**WHAT THEY SAID** ***'I want all my movies to be special, all the way down my filmography. There are people not even born yet who are going to dig my movies.' (Quentin Tarantino)***

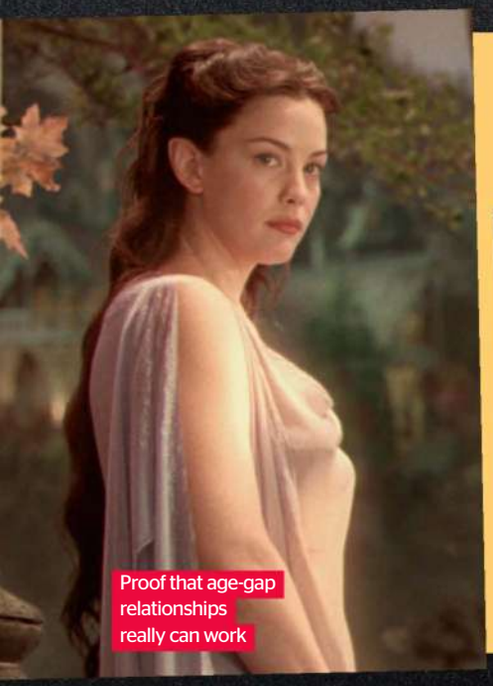
Top Grier

Preparing for an epic case of sunburn

## GLADIATOR
### ISSUE 41, JUNE 2000

Are you not entertained? We certainly were by Ridley Scott's Roman epic, a brutal and bloody loin-girdler that triumphantly resurrected the sword-and-sandal genre to Oscar-winning effect. One of those accolades rightly went to cover star Russell Crowe for his mesmerising turn as Maximus, a soldier turned showman who will have his vengeance in this life or the next against the emperor who murdered his family (Joaquin Phoenix). And while we are stoked to find out how Scott and Paul Mescal will continue the story in *Gladiator 2*, it's probably asking too much for it to best an original so beloved.

**WHAT THEY SAID** ***'I hired a gangbuster of a cast and put my faith in them. Despite all the problems, I think they did a pretty good job.' (Ridley Scott)***



Proof that age-gap relationships really can work

## THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS
### ISSUE 72, JANUARY 2003

*The Return of the King* (issue 84, January 2004) may have swept the board at 2004's Oscars, winning Best Picture and 10 more prizes besides. For our money, though, it's the second instalment in Peter Jackson's original Tolkien triptych that remains his most towering achievement. Not only did this film give us the Battle of Helm's Deep – surely the most heart-stopping, awe-inspiring armoured face-off in all of fantasy cinema – but also Andy Serkis' Gollum in all his psychotic, emaciated glory. The scene in which the corrupted hobbit's two personas bicker, cajole and bargain is mo-cap acting at its finest and most ingenious.

**WHAT THEY SAID** ***'This has a lot more action than the first one. There are new creatures and places, over 600 CGI shots and huge battle scenes. Audiences should get swept up by it.' (Peter Jackson)***

Just when we'd come to terms with the death of Gandalf the Grey

'Peter, now is not the time for another upside-down kiss!'

## SPIDER-MAN 2

### ISSUE 91, SUMMER 2004

There have been 10 standalone Spider-Man movies in our lifetime, and that's not counting the three films in which he's appeared as part of the MCU. Of all the Spideys we've put on our cover, however, it is the second part of Sam Raimi's Tobey Maguire trilogy that sits masked head and shoulders above them. Have adventure, drama and romance ever been so seamlessly united in one superhero movie? And has any supervillain since been quite so cool as Alfred Molina's Doc Ock? Well, maybe one (see overleaf). Yet the real marvel is undoubtedly how fresh it still feels, even 20 years on.

**WHAT THEY SAID** ***'I wasn't setting out to make this one better than the last. My job was to find out what was interesting about the first picture and develop it.' (Sam Raimi)***

Remember when people thought he couldn't play Bond because of his hair colour?

## CASINO ROYALE

### ISSUE 122, DECEMBER 2006

Pierce Brosnan was Bond when *TF* was born, and he made several appearances on our covers. When Daniel Craig was cast as his successor, though, it was clear from the off we were in for something different. Martin Campbell's film – his second Bond after 1995's *GoldenEye* – delivered on that promise with a tough, gritty do-over that took its cue from its leading man's game-changing portrayal. Craig's days in the tuxedo weren't always golden, yet his willingness to be as vulnerable as he was ruthless, and as human as he was heroic, ensured his dynamic double-O debut was damn near definitive.

**WHAT THEY SAID** ***'We're not doing Hamlet, but having an actor of Dan's ability makes a huge difference. The book formulates the character of Bond, and Dan encapsulates what Fleming was talking about.' (Martin Campbell)***

## WALL·E

### ISSUE 142, SUMMER 2008

Pixar was just getting started when *TF*'s presses began rolling, and it took a while for us to land on the perfect cover-worthy film from the game-changing animation studio. By the time Andrew Stanton introduced us to his lovelorn robot trash-picker, however, every new Pixar release had become an event, meaning it was a relative no-brainer for us to make its metal lead our only animated cover star. Watching WALL·E wordlessly fall for the sleek and hi-tech EVE touched our team's hearts in ways we never thought were possible. The result was an animated *2001* every bit as warm as Kubrick's was arctic.

**WHAT THEY SAID** ***'I wrote the first act of the movie in a couple of months. It's a simple love story of a guy robot and a girl robot.' (Andrew Stanton)***

Tell us you wouldn't do anything for those big round eyes

# THE DARK KNIGHT

## ISSUE 143, JULY 2008

We were on something of a roll in 2008, the issue with *WALL•E* on the cover having a blockbuster sequel of its own in an edition dominated by Christopher Nolan's landmark Batman follow-up. In truth, its predecessor could have also made it onto this list. However, we opted to give *The Dark Knight* the edge over *Batman Begins* for its superior action, dystopian daring and a rogue element that no one saw coming: Heath Ledger's Joker, a bonkers force of twisted nature that instantly became the jewel in the crown of its late creator's posthumous big-screen legacy.

**WHAT THEY SAID** ***'The sequels I've really liked have been films like The Empire Strikes Back or The Godfather Part II. We were looking to try to emulate them in terms of our ambition.' (Christopher Nolan)***

Heath Ledger, 1979-2008. Such an incredible loss

Some days just don't go to plan

# MAD MAX: FURY ROAD

## ISSUE 231, MAY 2015

We weren't around when George Miller released his original Mad Max trilogy, but we were here for *Fury Road*, as audacious and jaw-dropping a reboot as any we've had the pleasure of witnessing. Tom Hardy's re-energised Rockatansky occupied the foreground in our cover two-shot, with Charlize Theron's Furiosa located subtly behind him. In the film itself, though, it was Theron who took the reins, her buzzcut-sporting, metal-armed badass establishing herself immediately as an action heroine for the ages. 'I don't think anyone's ever seen anything quite like Furiosa before,' Miller told us in 2015. To find out how Anya Taylor-Joy compares, flip to page 30.

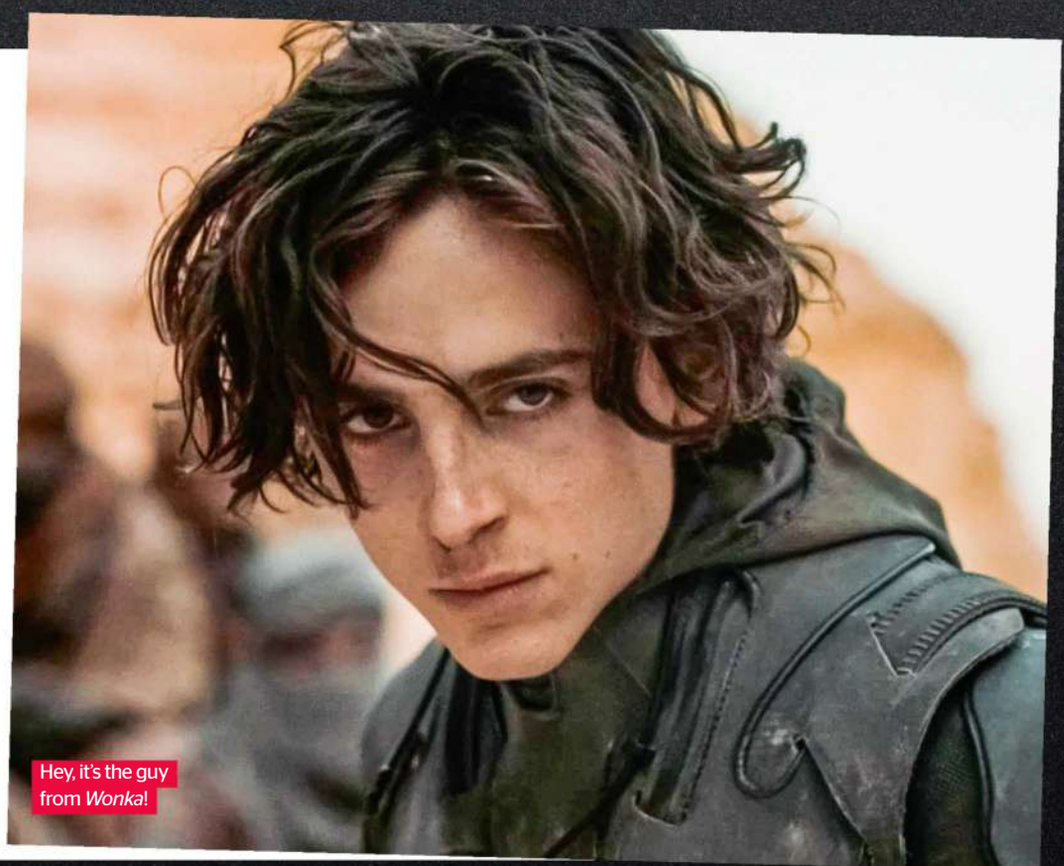
**WHAT THEY SAID** ***'Every sequence had some element of risk or stunt. That was the thing that created the most anxiety in me: how are we going to avoid killing someone today?' (George Miller)***

# DUNE: PART ONE

## ISSUE 315, SEPTEMBER 2021

With *Blade Runner 2049* and *Dune: Part Two* just as worthy of inclusion, it was a hard job deciding which Denis Villeneuve film ought to feature in this rundown. When push comes to shove, however, it's impossible to look past the first of his Dunes, a masterful exercise in comprehensive world-building that did Frank Herbert's novel proud in ways David Lynch never could. Admittedly, much of it is scene-setting: a prelude to a second act that was bigger, bolder and grander in its conception and execution. When viewed as a visionary filmmaker's artistic statement, though, *Part One* was ultimately purer.

**WHAT THEY SAID** ***'At the end of the day a movie exists once it's shared with audience members. It is a relief to know that people are feeling we honoured the source material.' (Denis Villeneuve)***



Hey, it's the guy from *Wonka*!



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# TOP GUN: MAVERICK

## ISSUE 323, APRIL 2022

Six Mission: Impossibles were released between the original Tony Scott *Top Gun* and its long-in-gestation sequel. It was probably not surprising, then, that there was a touch of the IMF to its story of an older but not necessarily wiser Maverick tutoring the next gen of naval aviators, one of whom (Miles Teller) just happens to be the son of his late pal, Goose. Sky-scorching action was a given in Joseph Kosinski's jet-propelled people-pleaser, yet what really slayed us was the emotional heights it took us to. Case in point? A Tom Cruise-Val Kilmer reunion that had us weeping buckets.

**WHAT THEY SAID** ***'The first film was a rite-of-passage story, and I knew this had to be the same. There had to be an emotional journey for Maverick to go through.' (Joseph Kosinski)***

Flying back into the Danger Zone

Tom Cruise: our wingman, anytime

# WHAT WERE WE THINKING? FIVE COVER CHOICES THAT CAME BACK TO HAUNT US...

### LARA CROFT: TOMB RAIDER – THE CRADLE OF LIFE
### ISSUE 80, SEPTEMBER 2003

'Sharper', 'edgier' and 'sexier' were among the words we used to trumpet Angelina's second Lara saga. 'Lousier' would have sufficed.

### CATWOMAN
### ISSUE 87, APRIL 2004

A mere 10 months after we put this 8%-on-Rotten Tomatoes movie on our cover, star Halle Berry called the superhero stinker 'a piece of shit'. Meow!

### VAN HELSING
### ISSUE 88, MAY 2004

And then what did we do? Why, only put Hugh Jackman's Dracula dreck-tacular on the cover of our very next issue. Spring 2004 was obviously a difficult time for us...

### THE SPIRIT
### ISSUE 144, AUGUST 2008; ISSUE 149, CHRISTMAS 2008

We all make mistakes, don't we? And devoting two – two! – covers to Frank Miller's comic-book calamity is definitely one of our biggest.

### TERMINATOR GENISYS
### ISSUE 233, JULY 2015

We went all the way to Los Angeles to report on Arnie's cyborg comeback. We should have stayed at home. Does anyone still have their free interactive poster?

INTERVIEW **JORDAN FARLEY**

# ‘WHEN CHOICES ARE MADE ALMOST ALGORITHMICALLY, I THINK THAT IS THE DEATH OF CREATIVITY’

# GEORGE MACKAY

Cast in his first film out of school at age 10, George MacKay has specialised in transformational performances, grounded by studied physicality, across a two-decade-plus career. Ahead of an eye-catching triple role in romantic tragedy *The Beast*, MacKay tells *Total Film* that his best is yet to come. ‘I just want to do good work,’ he says. ‘I just want to do better work.’

PORTRAITS **KOSTAS MAROS**

KOSTAS MAROS



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Quietly one of the hardest-working actors around, George MacKay is typically busy when *Total Film* catches up with the ever-affable star at the Glasgow Film Festival in mid-March. Here to promote his latest role(s) in Bertrand Bonello's unnerving, metaphysical romance *The Beast*, he'll be rolling into production on his next movie in a matter of days. 'I feel genuinely so grateful for all the work I get to do,' MacKay says from a Glasgow hotel room best described as functional. 'I'm wary of sounding wanky, but I do have a real love for work.'

A professional actor since the age of 10, when he was cast as Curly in P.J. Hogan's *Peter Pan*, MacKay has habitually appeared in multiple projects a year ever since. Born in Hammersmith, MacKay leapfrogged typical child-actor roles on TV, instead winning kid parts in adult productions, with early breaks in the likes of *Defiance*, alongside Daniel Craig, and HBO mini-series *Tsunami: The Aftermath*.

After finding his voice in his teens, MacKay let his pipes do the talking in Dexter Fletcher's 2013 Proclaimers jukebox musical *Sunshine on Leith*, and displayed his range by appearing in Kevin Macdonald's dystopian romance *How I Live Now* that same year. In 2016, he earned plaudits as Viggo Mortensen's headstrong eldest son in *Captain Fantastic* – displaying early signs of what would become a fascination with intense, transformative physicality.

MacKay's career since has been defined by a series of challenging, wildly varied roles that – coupled with the choice to keep his personal life out of the limelight – make him a rare character actor with leading-man credentials. Whether a sympathetic member of the Hitler Youth in *Where Hands Touch*, a patient undergoing treatment for clinical lycanthropy in *Wolf*, a misanthropic graffiti artist in *I Came By*, or a closeted gay man who commits a homophobic hate crime in *Femme*, MacKay's choices do not adhere to the typical movie-star playbook.

In *1917* and *True History of the Kelly Gang* – released within weeks of each other in the early pre-pandemic months of 2020 – MacKay did some of his best work to date, essaying young men at war, possessed by a single-minded determination to see their journeys through to the end. To play Australian outlaw Ned Kelly, MacKay underwent an intense period of preparation, writing in character as Kelly, forming a band with fellow cast-mates and turning his body into a sinewy coiled spring – an experience that put him in good stead for the physically gruelling demands of *1917*'s 'one-shot' odyssey across the European battlefield.

As Lance Corporal Schofield in Sam Mendes' *1917*

It's this commitment to his craft, and chameleonic quality, that brought him to *The Beast*. Bertrand Bonello's ambitious, partially French-language, centuries-spanning romance stars MacKay and Léa Seydoux as Louis and Gabrielle (respectively), characters drawn together across three distinct eras – 1910 Paris, 2014 LA and a futuristic city in 2044 – with 'the beast' of the title a metaphor for the fear of love, which manifests in drastically different ways. 'I found that a fascinating conceit,' MacKay says. 'The idea that the thing that attaches these two people to each other as soulmates is the thing that keeps them apart.'

Essentially three roles in one, MacKay plays two distinct takes on the traditional romantic leading man in the 1910 and 2044 sections – but 2014 Louis is the biggest swing. Here, MacKay plays an American character modelled on a real criminal who posted misogynistic screeds online and went on to murder six people in 2014. 'I wanted to play around with this idea that 1910 Louis has the same fear as 2014, and has the same fear as 2044, and yet it manifests itself differently,' says MacKay. 'I would hope to transform myself to whatever's needed.'

**You perform long stretches of *The Beast* in French. Was that daunting?**

That was always part of the deal. The original lead role was written for the French actor Gaspard Ulliel, who Bertrand worked with before on *Saint Laurent*. Then when Gaspard tragically passed away, Bertrand wanted to look outside of France. But, still, it's fundamental that the character is French. I thought that would be an amazing challenge. I've spoken German in a film before, and I had a bit more of a handle on French. I mean from GCSE – just about grabbed a 'C'. [Laughs] It was actually my French teacher I WhatsApp-ed, and asked if she would read me my lines.

**How much French did you feel you needed to understand to be an equal collaborator?**

For the process of the audition, it was getting the phonetics correct. But beyond that, it became a big part of the job. I wanted to understand what Léa was saying, what I was saying – as three-dimensionally as I could – so that I could be directed, and so that I could act within it. There was a bit more English inserted into that first French portion of the story because of my involvement. And, actually, that made the English, ironically, the language of love between Gabrielle and Louis. There's something very intimate



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MacKay plays three roles in Bertrand Bonello's upcoming *The Beast*

about slipping into the privacy of a foreign language. But my big thing was wanting that to be totally unnoticeable.

**Beyond the language barrier, it must have been a challenging role – three distinct eras and characters…**
To be honest, it was one of the most exciting scripts I'd read for a long time. It's not an easy film, but there's this mixture of romance and existential thought with it. I'd never read a script so dense and so poetic and reaching so far with using the three different time zones. The reason for doing the film in general was Bertrand's script, and how huge the vision was. To be a part of that was all I wanted to do.

**Louis in 2014 is based on a real person who committed misogynistic terror attacks that same year. Did you have any concerns about embodying a character like that on screen?**
Yeah, for sure. I don't want to glorify that behaviour by giving it screen time. But, by the same token, the point of Bertrand using that particular man, and going verbatim with his way of being, and making these personal videos – it really tapped into a fear that I think is worth examining. Fear can be a very toxic thing. It's the root of a lot of conflict and aggression. This guy, we could just use him as an extreme version of the worst version of fear. Being consumed by it. And then it coming out in such a spiteful way. Because it was used for that purpose I thought it was a worthwhile thing to explore.

*'THE BEAST WAS ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING SCRIPTS I'D READ'*

**You've gravitated towards misanthropic characters in recent years. What is it about the darker side of humanity that you're drawn to?**
Maybe because I think it's healthy to see the other side of the coin, so to speak. We do put our best foot forward in most situations. But the world is very imbalanced. The older I get, the more I'm aware of that. And, also, there's the safety of doing it within stories. Somewhere within that tension is where I'm drawn to these characters and scripts.

**Has your criteria for what roles you pursue changed over the years?**
Not really. It's a mixture of a gut reaction, and then process. If the director offers something that is unique, or the character demands it, that's always a big turn-on for me. As well as keeping an eye on: 'This could be a cool thing to put in the world.' So it'd be a mixture of those things. And often those are distilled by the writing and the character, but also the director as well. I've been a fan of films particularly where the director's vision has been very strong. So if I can be in service to a vision I believe in, then that's a big pull to me.

**You started acting very young in P.J. Hogan's *Peter Pan*. When did it turn into a career for you?**
It was that first experience [on *Peter Pan*] when I was 10. I don't know that I ever consciously thought, 'Oh, yeah, I could make this a whole living.' But I remember there were adults who were doing it who, legitimately, it was their job. Seeing *Gladiator* for the first time – the DVD of *Gladiator* – and being like: 'Wow'. The behind-the-scenes just blew my mind. And then working with Eddie Marsan [on 2012 BBC drama *The Best of Men*] when I was 19… Because there's this reputation of actors being really pretentious, or difficult. I thought, 'Oh, God, does that go with the territory?' Eddie was so professional. He did all the things I thought an actor who works really hard does. And it made him better. But it was totally unselfconscious. It was a very practical thing that I found so inspiring. It genuinely was a bit of a eureka moment: 'Wow, you can take this really seriously, and it not be difficult for others.' And, therefore, if you treat it like a craft, you can get better at it as well. That seemed to answer all the worries I had about hoping to make an entire life out of it, as I was just leaving school.

ALAMY, VERTIGO RELEASING

**You were cast in huge productions, like *Defiance* and *Tsunami: The Aftermath*, while still a teenager. Were those experiences a trial by fire?**
Yeah. I guess the arena is a bit bigger. But the practicalities of it are no different from doing a school play. Obviously, the people that you're doing it with, you understand the reputation of. There's a huge amount of learning that comes with that, and the responsibility of there being lots of people. But the actual doing of it? Playing a scene is the same in an audition as it is in a rehearsal, as it is on set. What those experiences gave me was the opportunity to learn without thinking too much about it, before I had the concept of pressure. I don't know exactly what it did to me, but you go, 'Oh, those people are just people.'

**Before the pandemic, you'd regularly appear in four to five films a year. What do you attribute that drive to work to?**
I really love work, so I feel very lucky. My dad always worked really, really hard; I saw that growing up. It's about, if the opportunities are there, wanting to give your all to them. It's really competitive as well. To get the chance to be in these different things, it's wonderful. The idea of being in those fundamental films – that's huge. I get really inspired when you see a really good play or a really good film. People taking big swings and it coming off. I think that's beautiful. I also like the idea that work could beget really good work. Maybe that's something to trip up on. There's a balance sometimes of not working for the sake of things, or overdoing it. I have to work harder at sitting still, sometimes. If I've got something to do, I feel so much calmer!

**You haven't participated in IP filmmaking. Has that been a conscious decision, or have the opportunities not been there?**
It's a mixture of both, to be honest. I've gone towards the projects that speak to me the most. But there have been a couple of bigger films that I would have loved to have been a part of – I just didn't get the role. I'm a huge fan of those big visions, but often the budgets go to something that's quite narrow, creatively. So when that budget goes with a big vision, it's a dream.

I do believe that when choices are made almost algorithmically, as to like, 'Well, that works, so now let's do another one just like that' – I think that is the death of creativity. I think there is a genuine danger with [films] being made on those terms, purely business-wise. I appreciate it does keep the lights on but, beyond the next financial year or so, it erodes

# FIVE STAR TURNS

**SUNSHINE ON LEITH** (2013)
MacKay plays a squaddie (one of several across his career) who returns home from Afghanistan and finds love to the feel-good beats of The Proclaimers in Dexter Fletcher's adaptation of the stage musical. All together now: 'But I would walk 500 miles...'

**CAPTAIN FANTASTIC** (2016)
*Captain Fantastic* put Viggo Mortensen on the awards circuit but MacKay deserved to be there alongside him. As eldest son Bodevan he voices the discontent of his siblings, raised in the wilderness by their survivalist father.

**1917** (2020)
Sam Mendes' technically dazzling war movie tracks MacKay's Lance Corporal Schofield on a physically gruelling ordeal to deliver a vital message across enemy territory. The climactic 'Schofield Run' – featuring two unscripted collisions – was achieved on the second take.

**TRUE HISTORY OF THE KELLY GANG** (2020)
MacKay cemented his mastery of accents and complex characterisations with his portrayal of bushranger Ned Kelly. Released days before lockdown in the UK, and under-seen as a result, it's one of that year's finest performances.

**FEMME** (2023)
Demonstrating a willingness to go to very dark places, MacKay plays a closeted thug who commits a homophobic attack on Nathan Stewart-Jarrett's drag queen, only to unwittingly enter into a consensual sexual relationship with his revenge-fuelled victim. **JF**

ALAMY



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people's creativity, because it breeds a generation of arid thought.

That's why I think there's a sweet spot in terms of financing these bigger visions to inspire, but that wealth being shared among a more varied category of films. This last year has been great – *Oppenheimer*, *Poor Things*, *The Zone of Interest*, and *Barbie*, of course, which is a genius subversion of an IP-based film. Maybe it's the tide shifting a wee bit.

**Would the idea of starring in a blockbuster-scale project make you nervous about potential consequences on your life outside of work?**

I try not to think about fame and things. It feels maybe a bit unrealistic to not talk about it, but that's not something that's crossed my path, for now. If I was ever lucky enough to be a part of something like that, I would hope that it's a big film you really want to be a part of. Therefore, you understand what you give over in the process of that as well. But also I do believe that actors should be chameleons, and therefore it goes hand-in-hand with someone being anonymous, when you're not in character.

> *'THE IDEA OF BEING IN THOSE FUNDAMENTAL FILMS – THAT'S HUGE'*

**Do you think fame is antithetical to being a chameleon on screen?**

Yeah, totally. I think that's the trick. If you go to see the big name – rather than going to see the character – it works against it. It's a bit of a catch-22. People put a lot of money into these projects and you've got to get bums on seats. So if you want to be a part of those bigger projects often [fame is] a prerequisite. It's a path to be walked. But I think that's the contradiction. If you're like, 'Who the fuck is that?' and you just see the character, it then becomes another thing. Then there's an almost meta element – people might think there's a correlation between the real person and the character. Then that narrows further opportunities, I guess.

**In early 2020 you starred in films for Justin Kurzel and Sam Mendes – *True History of the Kelly Gang* and *1917*. Did you have a sense going into those films that they would be pillars for your career?**

Ned… I wanted that role more than anything. My dad's Australian and I felt like I was at a point in my life, mid-20s, where you're figuring out who you are, and looking back on your roots, and wanting to throw yourself into something with work. At the time, it was just me, myself and I. And genuinely [Kurzel's] *Snowtown* is the most affected I've ever been in a cinema. I watched that at the Soho Curzon, and was floored. And then woke up sad the next day.

I auditioned for Justin for a role in his *Macbeth* film and didn't get it, but I was just so thrilled at getting to meet him. I was in awe of Justin. So the opportunity of doing a 'young man; a family; who are you?; what does it all mean?' film with Justin, and history, and Australia, and the process that he puts you through – it's the most intense experience that I've ever had. It means so, so much to me, that film. I was prepping for months before and then the finances fell apart. It fell down for nearly half a year, and then came back up again. So Ned is always really close to my heart.

**And *1917*? That must have been a whirlwind…**

It was almost because of the rigours of filming Ned that I came home and auditioned for *1917*, and I remember thinking, 'I know how this man feels.' That thing of just trying to hold it together and carry on. [Laughs] It's not like I've been through a war, but I just felt like I knew the sensibilities of Schofield. And then when Sam, for the third audition, sat down with Dean [Charles Chapman] and I, he was like, 'Well, if you boys get to do this, it's all going to be in one shot. So we're going to rehearse for months.' And it was like, 'Oh my god, yeah!' [Cinematographer, Roger] Deakins was getting mentioned, and Dennis Gassner, our production designer, and you're like, 'This is the best of the best!' Those were such incredible working experiences that then when they came out and had a really wonderful run, that was an amazing time. So I wasn't unaware. My gratefulness for getting those jobs was profound.

**How much do roles like Ned Kelly and Schofield in *1917* take it out of you? Are they difficult characters to leave behind?**

Not necessarily to leave behind. But, again, without sounding wanky, they mark you a little bit. I definitely felt marked by the experience of working with Justin – and I revered that. I would love to do it again, absolutely, in a heartbeat. It's so many things. It's confusing. It's affirming. It's blissful. But it was tough, you know? And with *1917* there was a profound life lesson towards the end of that. The film starts on the move. It happens in real time. And it ends on the move. You know that after the last frame of the film when he closes his eyes – he'll probably take a minute, get up, get some food, and he'll probably get drafted to another battle, and it just

## GEORGE MACKAY IN NUMBERS

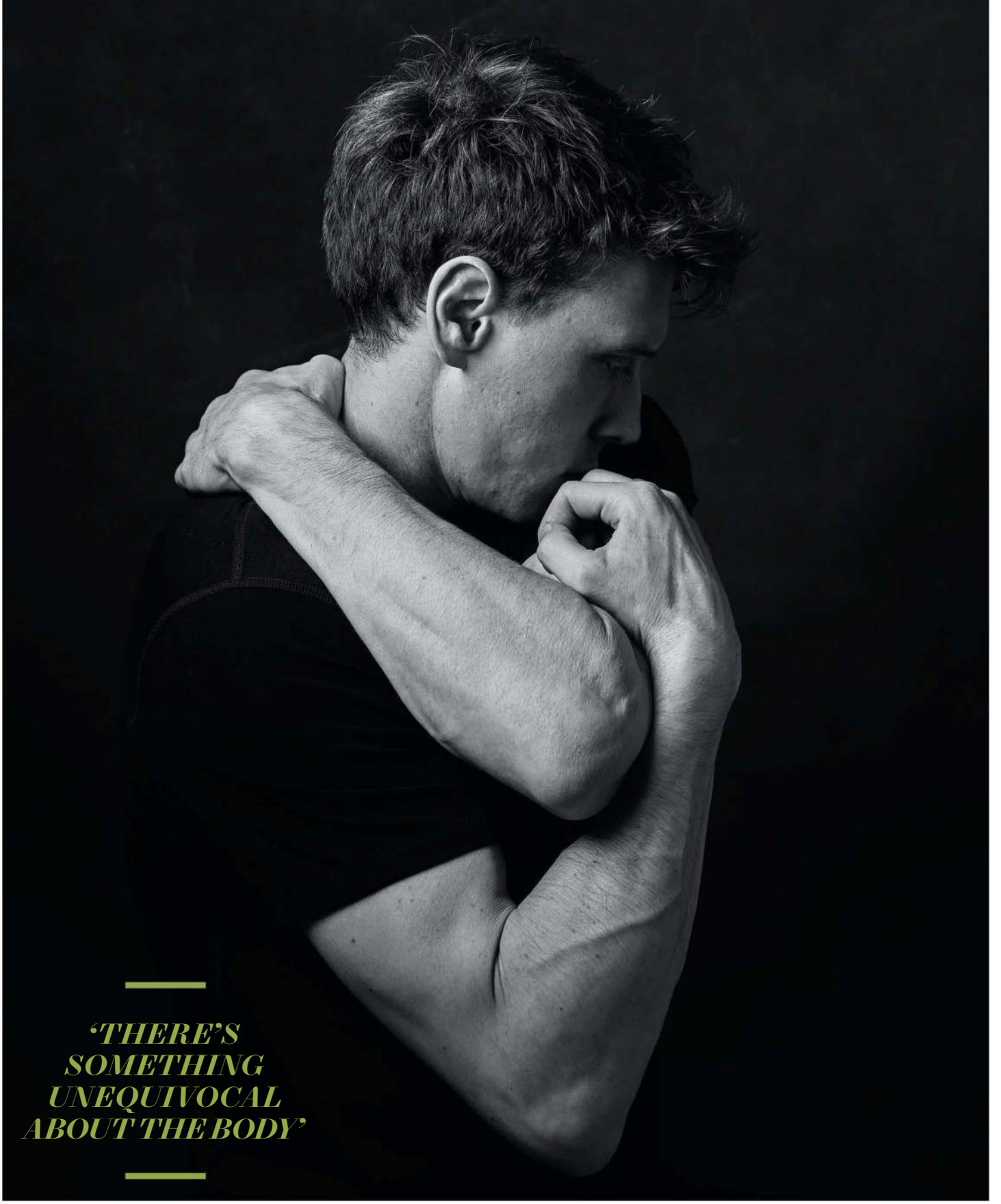
**1**
BAFTA nomination for the Rising Star Award in 2014.

**$384,580,017**
The box-office take of his highest-grossing film, *1917*.

**10**
MacKay's age when he was cast in P.J. Hogan's *Peter Pan*.

**300m**
The distance covered during *1917*'s 'Schofield Run'; 500 extras featured.

**4**
Weeks – the time it took MacKay and his *Kelly Gang* cast to get their punk band, Fleshlight, stage-ready.



*'THERE'S SOMETHING UNEQUIVOCAL ABOUT THE BODY'*

carries on. The profundity in it is how much attention to pay to the moment. That's the point of the film and I think that's the point of a lot of Sam's work. Then the rigour with which Justin made me focus on Ned, it narrows your focus. That was quite a healthy pair of lessons to learn, to then make peace with finishing those jobs. And, beautifully, I had a lot of stuff in my personal life open up. After *1917*, there was lots to tend to there instead of work for a wee while, too.

**Many of your recent performances are connected by an intense, transformative physicality. When did using your body as an instrument become as important as it has become to you?**

I'm fascinated with extremes. There's something unequivocal about the body. There's something tangible that can't be faked. And in the doing of it, you can feel it. A big part of that came from Justin as well, with the shape we had to get into with Ned, and Matt [Ross] on *Captain Fantastic* as well. A first impression is so fundamental, because if you don't have a surface level, you can't even begin with subtext. The physical side of things, for me, that's a good anchor for other stuff.

**Are there any projects that you're particularly proud of that didn't get the recognition at the time?**

I was really touched that you brought up *True History of the Kelly Gang*, because it got



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a good response from the folk that did see it, but it landed right at the top of the pandemic, so it went straight to streaming, quite quickly. That is a very personal project. There was a project, *Bypass*, that I did years ago that, again, everyone just threw themselves at. And it was, personally, a really fundamental experience. *Wolf*… I don't know if it got released in UK cinemas, and I know that was [director Nathalie Biancheri's] intention.

**You filmed scenes for Shane Meadows' *The Gallows Pole* that were ultimately cut. Is that a difficult thing to deal with as an actor?**

Yes and no. I'm such a fan of Shane's work, and still am. And I love the series as well, *The Gallows Pole*. What's so amazing about Shane is, he follows his process. So much of the story was found in the moment, and expanded in a way that went away from the character that I played, and others. In a sense, it's great that happens. There is a version that maybe would have been diluted creatively that would have involved everything it was meant to, and maybe it wouldn't have been what the series was. That, I learned.

Personally, I totally feel grand with it. You want people to see that work, and for it to be a calling card for the next one, hopefully. But it's a proper test of: what an experience is to you in the moment, is the truth of it, and what it is to everyone else, you have to let be.

**Are there other filmmakers who you haven't had the chance to work with yet that you'd like to?**

Yeah. Denis Villeneuve, is he listening? [Laughs] People like Denis Villeneuve and Greig Fraser, his DoP, and his crew members as well, who are working on a top, top level, on that big, big scale, but purely creatively – I feel like that's the dream. There's very few, really. It's Nolan, Denis Villeneuve, Steve McQueen. Those who have managed to walk that path – Yorgos Lanthimos and Jonathan Glazer as well – people who are making artistic films on a bigger scale, purely to facilitate that vision.

As bushranger Ned Kelly in *True History of the Kelly Gang*

**You've got Joshua Oppenheimer's *The End* coming up. What can you say?**

It's a musical. It's about a family who are the last family on Earth, who live inside of a bunker, with which they've kept themselves safe. And it's about the micro-dynamics of this family, and how they came to be the last family on Earth, ostensibly. Josh's documentaries are so stunning, and I think this is a subject on which he is quite an expert about – the ramifications of smaller actions, of denial. And he's created this amazing script that interrogates all of that via this family in a very heightened scenario. His reasons for turning it into a musical are totally legitimate, and really harnessing [the genre] for all the things that he wants to explore and provoke. I feel really proud to be a part of it. You've got Tilda [Swinton] and Michael Shannon. And the DoP as well, Mikhail Krichman, who did *Leviathan* and *Loveless*. And Josh Schmidt, the composer. The music is just gorgeous as well. It was a really stellar team. I feel very glad to be in the mix. I'm really intrigued to see how it all turns out. I haven't seen the finished film yet. I know they're not too far away from it. Hopefully folk will be getting to see it in the not-too-distant future.

**What is your 10-year plan?**

It's just to continue learning, and all of those learning experiences facilitate what you want to do next. Also, some of it is out of my control as well. I want to get better at it. That's that, really. In a sense, if you're true to that, that will help inform all of the other things. The context with which you do it, and how you do it, and why you do it – it's just wanting to get better. It's just to get better. That's it.

**Are there more French-language films in your future?**

Yeah. If they come along. I hope they understand I need a fair bit of practice beforehand! But totally. It was really lovely to work properly in France with a French crew, and how they revere cinema, and the vibe on set, and culturally what's valued, and what's different. I'd love to do more French films. But there's Italian and Spanish. I'm up for all of it. I thought that was so classy with Sandra Hüller – two [BAFTA] nominations in three different languages. It's very, very classy.

**THE BEAST OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 31 MAY.**

## GEORGE MACKAY LINE READING

**'I'VE NEVER MET A LESBIAN BEFORE'**
**JOE/BROMLEY** PRIDE

**'Stick it to the man!'**
**BODEVAN**
CAPTAIN FANTASTIC

**'KNOW THAT I SHALL TELL NO LIE, LET ME BURN IN HELL SHOULD I SPEAK FALSE'**
**NED KELLY**
TRUE HISTORY OF THE KELLY GANG

ALAMY, KOSTAS MAROS

EDITED BY
MATTHEW LEYLAND
@TOTALFILM_MATTL

★★★★★
WOULD BE DANGEROUS TO MISS IT

★★★★½
OVERCOMES ALL OBSTACLES

★★★½★
THRILLS AND SPILLS

★★½★★
NOT WORTH THE RISK

★★★★★
HEALTH HAZARD

# SCREEN

THE WORLD'S MOST TRUSTED MOVIE

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**THE FALL GUY**
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## ALSO RELEASED

We couldn't see them in time for this issue, so head to gamesradar.com/totalfilm for reviews of the following:

| TITLE | RELEASE DATE |
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| Abigail | Out now |
| IF | 17 May |
| Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes | 9 May |
| The Strangers: Chapter 1 | 17 May |

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# REVIEWS

# THE FALL GUY 12A

## Barbenheimer round two...

★★★★★ **OUT 2 MAY** CINEMAS

Look, guys, this is no time for a duet

**Those who saw Ryan Gosling and Emily Blunt's skit at the 2024 Academy Awards, introducing a tribute to the stunt community, will surely have had their appetites whetted for *The Fall Guy*. A contemporary reboot of the 1980s TV series, in which Lee Majors played a stuntman who moonlights as a bounty hunter, this buzzy action comedy fizzes largely thanks to the easy-on-the-eye chemistry that Gosling and Blunt showed on Oscar night. On this evidence, they could – and should – form an ongoing double act.**

Gosling plays Colt Seavers, a successful stunt performer who is having a bit of a thing with camera operator Jody Moreno (Blunt). For the past six years, he's been the double for A-list star Tom Ryder (Aaron Taylor-Johnson), but things go disastrously wrong during a calamitous daredevil 100ft plunge. Rushed to hospital with a broken back, Colt is out of the game. When the movie cuts to 18 months later, he's eking out a living as a valet at a Mexican restaurant.

Out of the blue, he's contacted by producer Gail Meyer (*Ted Lasso*'s Hannah Waddingham), who requires his services in Sydney, Australia, on the set of new sci-fi *Metalstorm*, which stars Ryder. When Colt arrives, he's shocked to discover that Jody is calling the shots as director, and she is less than pleased to see him. For the past year and a half, Colt had ghosted Jody, struggling to cope with his injuries and his feelings for her. Needless to say, their reunion is on a rocky road.

The plot's motor really starts to spin when it appears that Ryder has gone missing and Colt is sent to track him down, with help from stunt coordinator Dan Tucker (Winston Duke) and the actor's personal assistant, Alma Milan (Stephanie Hsu). When Colt starts to play detective, the twists come thick and fast, as bodies pile up and it transpires that our hero may be 'the fall guy' in more ways than one.

The search for Ryder keeps the plot ticking over, but it really plays second fiddle to the two leads trading barbs and steamy looks as the craziness of a full-scale Hollywood production goes on around them. Boasting the tagline 'It's high noon at the edge of the universe', *Metalstorm* looks like the sort of franchise nonsense studio executives greenlight in their sleep – just one of the good-natured ribbings the film industry endures in a screenplay by Drew Pearce (*Iron Man 3*).

While there isn't a lot of in-depth probing of Seavers – as character studies go, the film operates on a superficial level – *The Fall Guy* is never less than bags of fun. Some of the best scenes come as Blunt and a high-Kenergy Gosling occupy each other's orbit, like the sequence where Jody repeatedly demands Colt perform a stunt where he's set on fire and yanked into a rock while she yells out her grievances through a megaphone.

UNIVERSAL

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

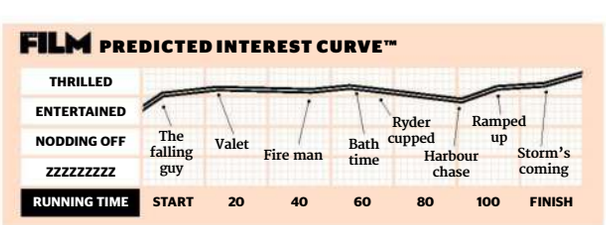
**THE FALL GUY**
1981-86
Lee Majors was the original unknown stuntman in the TV show, which ran for five seasons.

**DRIVE**
2011
The last time Gosling played a stuntman he doubled as a getaway driver in this ultra-cool thriller.

**ONCE UPON A TIME... IN HOLLYWOOD**
2019
Brad Pitt's achingly cool stuntman, Cliff Booth, packs heat in Tarantino's twisted Tinseltown tale.

*For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm*

**DIRECTOR** David Leitch **STARRING** Ryan Gosling, Emily Blunt, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Hannah Waddingham, Stephanie Hsu, Winston Duke **SCREENPLAY** Drew Pearce **DISTRIBUTOR** Universal **RUNNING TIME** 126 mins



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The Gos and Blunt aren't the only perfect match, meanwhile, with the movie directed by former stuntman David Leitch (*Atomic Blonde*). The filmmaker brings his skill set to all the action sequences, particularly a superb speedboat chase through Sydney Harbour, but he also sharpens the penchant for comedy he showed with *Deadpool 2*. On this evidence, he deserves to fully break out of the action-director mould.

He is, of course, aided by a fine support cast. Waddingham, with a mass of dark curls, is very funny as the bullish producer, while Taylor-Johnson has a riot as the a-hole A-lister, coming on like a sort of über-Matthew McConaughey. Duke (*Us*, *Black Panther*) is also very watchable, making Tucker more than just a sidekick as he accompanies Colt on his adrenaline-fuelled adventures.

**'Former stuntman David Leitch brings his skill set to all the action sequences, but also sharpens the penchant for comedy he showed with *Deadpool 2*'**

Admittedly, the connection to the original TV show is tenuous at best. Let's face it, *The Fall Guy* is only likely to be remembered by those over 50, and even then it's hardly a show like *The A-Team* or *The Dukes of Hazzard* to get the nostalgia juices flowing. You're left with the feeling that the film could have been made under another title, with no brand recognition, and be no less successful. Still, that's Hollywood for you; at least the result emerges as a fine tribute to the unsung heroes of the movie business.

It's also a tad too long, with the final act stretching the conceit a bit too far (although the climactic sequence and the footage that accompanies the end credits are worth the protracted running time). But beyond these minor gripes, *The Fall Guy* is an effervescent comedy that truly flies. Finally, those stunning stuntmen have a film to call their own.

**JAMES MOTTRAM**

**THE VERDICT** A snappy, sharp, sexy screwball romance, with sparking chemistry between Gosling and Blunt, great support from Waddingham and ace action.

'OK, who messed up the hotel room booking?'

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

**JULES ET JIM**
1962
Jeanne Moreau, Oskar Werner and Henri Serre make the ultimate ménage in Truffaut's classic.

**WIMBLEDON**
2004
Paul Bettany and Kirsten Dunst find love in SW19 in Richard Loncraine's grass-court Britcom.

**PAST LIVES**
2023
Celine Song (aka Mrs. Kuritzkes) gives Greta Lee a dose of In-Yun in this poignant tear-jerker.

*For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm*

# CHALLENGERS TBC

## Mixed doubles...

★★★★★ **OUT 26 APRIL** CINEMAS

**DIRECTOR** Luca Guadagnino **STARRING** Zendaya, Josh O'Connor, Mike Faist, A.J. Lister **SCREENPLAY** Justin Kuritzkes
**DISTRIBUTOR** Warner Bros
**RUNNING TIME** 131 mins

**Anyone for tonsil tennis? It's the least you'd expect from Luca Guadagnino, the Italian maestro who defiled a peach in *Call Me by Your Name* and made cannibalism look sexy in *Bones and All*. It's hardly surprising, then, to see the Sport of Kings receive a racy makeover in his stylish latest, in which the on-court rivalry between two friends turned adversaries – cool customer Art (Mike Faist) and wild card Patrick (Josh O'Connor) – comes with a sizzling undertow of erotic tension.**

The nominal source of their antipathy is Zendaya's Tashi, a Serena-ish prodigy turned exacting taskmistress who, having had her playing career curtailed by a cruel injury, has devoted herself to making husband Art the best he can be. A previous dalliance with Patrick when they were all promising up-and-comers, though, means her loyalties are nothing if not divided when her past and present partners come face to face again at a middling 'challenger' event.

But wait! Might Art and Patrick have their own private ball-game going on, one in which Tashi is merely a bystander? That's the provocative proposition at the heart of Guadagnino's drama, a tricksy affair storywise in which three narrative threads – the trio's amorous history, the run-up to the tournament and its sweat-drenched, grudge-match climax – are weaved together by writer Justin Kuritzkes into one serpentine, *Dunkirk*ian tapestry.

Keeping a handle on these multiple/simultaneous time frames can occasionally be as arduous as the tennis itself, elevated here by DoP Sayombhu Mukdeeprom into a dizzying battle of attrition and wills. (At one point the ball becomes his camera's PoV as it zooms from racquet to racquet, while elsewhere it's a projectile fired so directly at the viewer one almost feels obliged to duck.) Guadagnino, however, ensures things are always entertaining, one pivotal clinch involving two of his protagonists – a parking-lot embrace in the middle of a windstorm, incongruously scored by an angelic boys' choir singing Welsh hymn *Levy-Dew* – reaching an almost operatic level of sensuality and emotion.

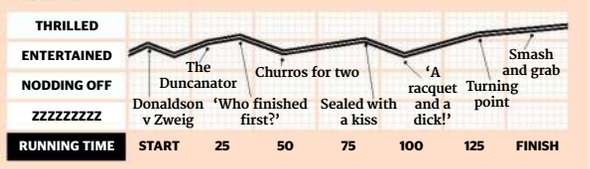
It might be too heady a brew for some, especially those whose appreciation of tennis is limited to strawberries and cream. On the acting front, though, it's a virtual grand slam, Zendaya, Faist and particularly O'Connor fine-tuning their characters' 13-year romantic imbroglio into a lusty love match for the ages.

**NEIL SMITH**

**THE VERDICT** Expect code violations aplenty from a pulsating tale of discord at the net cord that's sure to get deuces flowing.

WARNER

**FILM PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE™**



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# HOARD TBC

## Trash and carry...

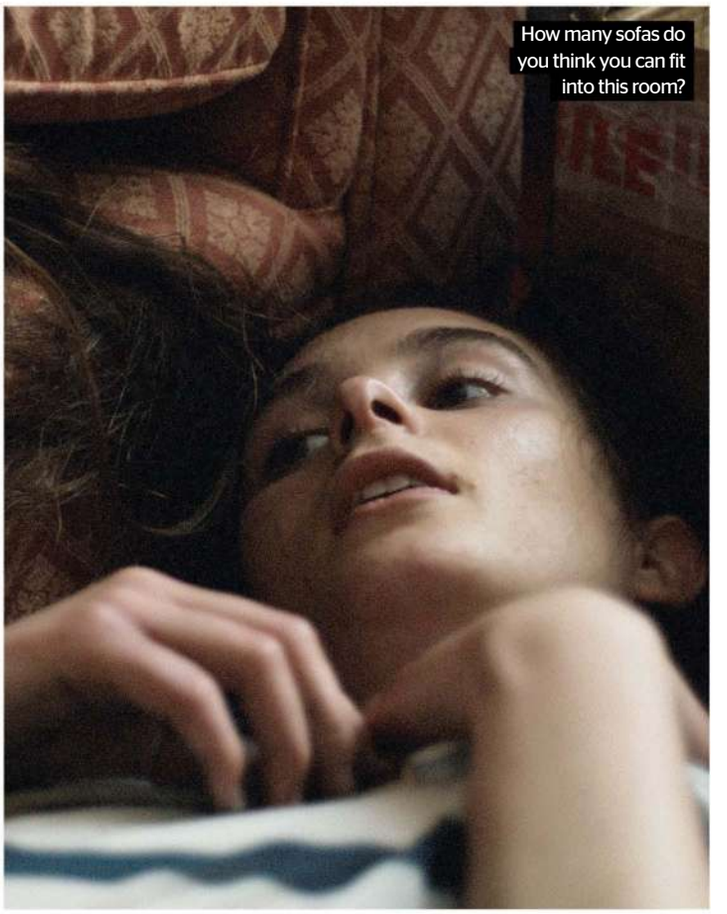
★★★★★ **OUT 17 MAY** CINEMAS

**Can you cling to the past by hoarding detritus, fragments of histories lost? Such is the premise for this visceral feature debut from British writer-director Luna Carmoon. A social-realist tale of sublimated grief and desire, *Hoard* embeds messy emotions in unruly sounds, images and performances with a lingering power.**

As a kid, Maria (Lily-Beau Leach) lives with mum Cynthia (Hayley Squires), a troubled hoarder of trash who suffers a tragic demise. A decade on, raised by loving foster mum Michelle (Samantha Spiro), 18-year-old Maria (Saura Lightfoot-Leon) bottles up her grief. But the cork bursts when memories of Cynthia are revived, just as Michelle's older charge Michael (Joseph Quinn) drops by.

As Maria embarks on volatile sexual escapades with Michael, she also begins dumpster-diving for waste, heading for a meltdown. Carmoon renders this looming psychosexual implosion with a startlingly tactile force – you can almost taste the spit and shepherd's pie exchanged on screen. While *Stranger Things*' Quinn is terrific, Lightfoot-Leon's feral performance fuels the film's wayward energies, recalling a young Samantha Morton. But *Hoard* summons its own ragged empathies. Some images seem forced, as if Carmoon couldn't bear losing them yet couldn't justify their presence, but that's a small quibble for a debut so disquietingly forceful. Even if *Hoard* is overstuffed, its purgative thrust feels tough, tender and true. **KEVIN HARLEY**

**THE VERDICT** Carmoon's heady, tangible drama is a debut to reckon with, galvanised by Lightfoot-Leon's electric lead.



How many sofas do you think you can fit into this room?

'You might think your guns give you an advantage here. You'd be wrong'

VERTIGO SIGNATURE

# BOY KILLS WORLD 18

## Silent but deadly...

★★★☆☆ **OUT 26 APRIL** CINEMAS

**Do the Skarsgård brothers share the same trainer? You have to wonder given Bill Skarsgård's shredded physique in Moritz Mohr's gonzo actioner, a muscular morphosis to match his older sibling Alexander's ripped build in *The Northman*.**

As a deaf orphan on a one-man mission to avenge himself on the totalitarian regime he blames for offing his family, Skarsgård's Boy lets his brawn do the talking in a gleefully bonkers blend of *The Hunger Games* and *The Raid*. Or he would, were his every move not accompanied by H. Jon Benjamin (*Bob's Burgers*) as an inner voice modelled on the narrator of Boy's favourite childhood video game.

As that precis suggests, this is a film where pretty much anything goes. A television show where dissidents are executed by a breakfast cereal's costumed mascots? Sure. *Downton Abbey*'s Michelle Dockery as a murderous enforcer? Why not. Gory fight scenes utilising cheese graters and Gatling guns? Bring it on. And while we're at it, let's have a lip-reading gag involving a growling rebel (Isaiah Mustafa) whose every utterance Boy garbles into gibberish ('Dodo buns!').

True, there comes a point when the wackiness gets wearying. Yet one can't deny *Boy Kills World* has a delirious energy to it that's not dissimilar to the John Wick franchise, a series Skarsgård exited at the end of its fourth chapter. **NEIL SMITH**

**THE VERDICT** Bill kills in a Sam Raimi-produced actioner that's probably best partnered with a non-anatomical six-pack.

Marisa Abela is captivating as late singer Amy Winehouse

# BACK TO BLACK 15

## Fame is a losing game...

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

**I want to be remembered for being a singer,' intones Amy Winehouse (*Industry*'s Marisa Abela) in Sam Taylor-Johnson's biopic of the iconic London musician. It's a noble sentiment, especially given Winehouse's tabloid-created infamy: her struggles with drink and drugs were splashed across the headlines in the lead-up to her death aged 27 in 2011.**

Marking scriptwriter Matt Greenhalgh's reunion with the director 15 years after John Lennon film *Nowhere Boy*, Taylor-Johnson's take on Winehouse's story holds back the muckraking and attempts to celebrate her work. We get a glimpse of the *Back to Black* singer's family life as she moves up the music industry food chain. But the film only truly hits its stride when she meets Blake Fielder-Civil (a cocksure Jack O'Connell), who she then marries and joins in a haze of substance abuse as her fame hits levels of near-hysteria.

Holding back on the grimier aspects of her decline, the film doesn't land the same emotional impact as Asif Kapadia's Oscar-winning doc *Amy*. It works best as a tumultuous love story, knitted together by a terrific Abela, who looks the part (tattoos, beehive) and gives a remarkable vocal performance. While the film doesn't exactly get under its subject's ink-covered skin, it serves a sobering – if rather strait-laced – look at the perils of fame. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

**THE VERDICT** A competent if occasionally clunky biopic is enlivened by a superb Marisa Abela, who truly inhabits Winehouse.

# CIVIL WAR 15

## American horror story...

★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

**You never know what's coming around the next corner!' veteran newsman Sammy (Stephen McKinley Henderson) cautions novice photographer Jessie (Cailee Spaeny) in writer-director Alex Garland's *Civil War*. It's advice worth heeding as they – with photojournalist Lee (Kirsten Dunst) and reporter Joel (Wagner Moura) – take a perilous journey through a future America in brutal conflict with itself.**

Yet Sammy's words also serve as an admonition from Garland to today's disunited States, whose partisan politics and ideological positions might indeed spawn a nightmare scenario akin to the one envisioned. What Lee and Joel are after is one final interview with the despotic president (Nick Offerman) before his imminent overthrow. Standing in their way are 800 miles of treacherous terrain, ruled by militias.

A palpable sense of dread pervades as the quartet plot a course through an apocalyptic landscape. Yet Garland also conveys the giddy rush they get from the visceral warfare – a guilty exhilaration we share.

The reasons behind the titular war are left intentionally, and rather frustratingly, vague. Taken as speculative fantasy, however, *Civil War* is never less than chillingly authentic. The maternal feelings Lee reluctantly develops for Spaeny's greenhorn allow shafts of humanity to emerge from behind the bleakness. For the most part, though, this is a gritty, gruelling thriller you endure as much as enjoy. **NEIL SMITH**

**THE VERDICT** There's no shortage of horrors in Garland's drama, whose thrills come steeped in moral complexity.

Press where, exactly?

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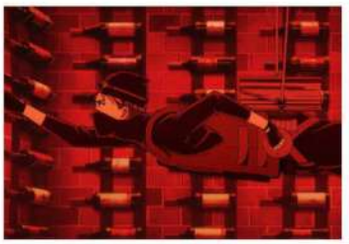


## SPY × FAMILY CODE: WHITE 12A

★★★★★ **OUT 26 APRIL** CINEMAS

A monster hit of Japanese media transitions to the big screen with this lively, endearing caper – a standalone treat for both fans of, and newcomers to, the manga or TV show. The Forger family take a weekend vacation, only to become embroiled in a warmongering scheme – dad's a spy, mum's an assassin, the young daughter's a telepath, and only she knows the others' secret identities. The slice-of-life comedy delights, while lushly animated setpieces that experiment with the show's house style more than justify the cinematic upgrade.

**JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**

## NEZOUH TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 3 MAY** CINEMAS

As bombs fall on war-torn Damascus, a close-knit family debate whether they should stay or go. For dad Mutaz (Samer al Masri), leaving is out of the question; for his wife, Hala (Kinda Alloush), and daughter Zeina (Hala Zein), it's a matter of survival. Syrian writer/director Soudade Kaadan's tale of female emancipation employs a surprising lightness of touch, despite the harrowing subject matter. Finding contrasting notes of joy and fantasy amid the rubble, this feminist parable delicately blends modern fairy-tale elements with heart-rending drama.

**JOEL HARLEY**

## ELAHA TBC

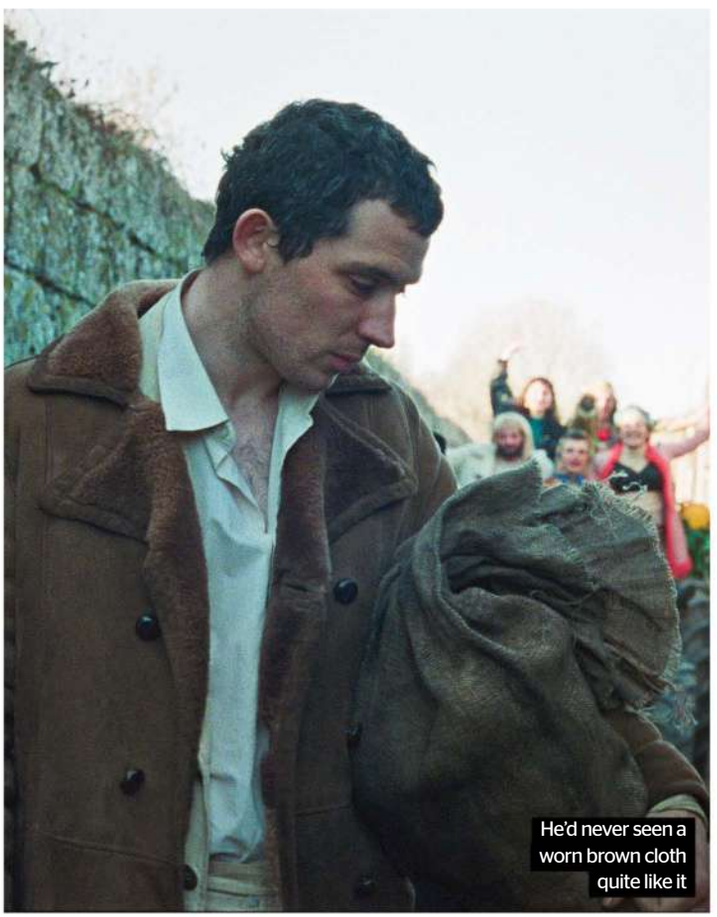
★★★★★ **OUT 26 APRIL** CINEMAS

Writer-director Milena Aboyan's character study confronts the effects of patriarchal cultural values via the story of a young German woman struggling to square her personal ambitions with the restrictive traditions of her Kurdish community. As anxious nearlywed Elaha (Bayan Layla) desperately seeks to disguise the loss of her virginity, the script occasionally threatens to stray into cliché. But Layla, seldom offscreen, doesn't strike a single false note – and her performance is aided by Aboyan's unfussy direction, boxy 1.33:1 framing adding to the claustrophobic mood. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

## CHASING CHASING AMY TBC

★★★☆☆ **OUT 17 MAY** CINEMAS

Some films get under your skin and for trans male filmmaker Sav Rodgers that film is, somewhat surprisingly, Kevin Smith's 1997 romcom *Chasing Amy*, where Ben Affleck's Holden enters into a relationship with queer woman Alyssa (Joey Lauren Adams) and then slut-shames her. Here, Rodgers interviews the team behind Smith's third feature and examines his complex relationship with it. The result has some sweet moments and interesting insights into LGBTQ+ art, but unless you already share Rodgers' passion for his subject, this is more curious than fascinating. **LEILA LATIF**



He'd never seen a worn brown cloth quite like it

## LA CHIMERA 15

### Tomb raiders...

★★★★☆ **OUT 10 MAY** CINEMAS

**Set in 1980s Tuscany, this tale of a charming man plundering artefacts from long-lost tombs is far from an Italian Indiana Jones. Rather, realism of the social and magical kinds weave together in a hybrid film that evokes Greek myth and the ghosts of Italy's past, comedy and tragedy, love and loss.**

At its bruised but beating heart is Arthur (Josh O'Connor, TV's *The Crown*, *God's Own Country*), a rumpled Englishman in a sullied suit who's just out of jail and grieving for his dead lover. Perhaps in touch with the spirit world, Arthur uses a rod to divine hidden burial sites, and together with a boisterous band of singing, bickering tombaroli that might have wandered in from a Fellini movie, he relieves the graves of their Etruscan antiquities. But then Arthur begins to connect with Italia (Carol Duarte, *The Invisible Life of Euridice Gusmao*), just as his dowsing rod steers him towards the find of his life. Which of these great discoveries will take precedence?

Confirming Alice Rohrwacher (*The Wonders*, *Happy as Lazzaro*) as one of Europe's preeminent auteurs, *La Chimera* deftly juggles moods but primarily settles on a tone of lovesick melancholy and hushed wonder. Vagabonds stealing from graves was big business in 80s Umbria, where Rohrwacher grew up, and she's here pillaged her own memories to present a film of sacred beauty.

**JAMIE GRAHAM**

**THE VERDICT** An Italian-speaking Josh O'Connor is a real treasure in a film that will survive the years.

No decade did denim quite like the 80s

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

**BOUND**
1996
The Wachowskis' first salvo is a sexy, stylish neo-noir.

**TITANE**
2021
Palme d'Or-winning Cronenbergian body horror.

**FEMME**
2023
An electrifying thriller set in London's drag community.

*For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm*

# LOVE LIES BLEEDING 15

## 'Roid trip...

★★★★★ **OUT 3 MAY** CINEMAS

**DIRECTOR** Rose Glass **STARRING** Kristen Stewart, Katy O'Brian, Ed Harris, Dave Franco, Jena Malone **SCREENPLAY** Rose Glass, Weronika Tofilska **DISTRIBUTOR** Lionsgate **RUNNING TIME** 104 mins

**British writer-director Rose Glass exploded onto the scene with 2019's *Saint Maud*, an oppressive, highly impressive chamber horror about a devout young woman experiencing ecstatic visions. Now backed by A24, plus some A-list names, she's moved country, and genre, to make a hyper-stylised thriller co-written with Weronika Tofilska. But here it's steroids, rather than scripture, offering mind-altering properties.**

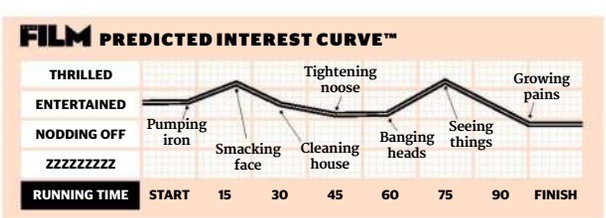
In 1980s Albuquerque, bored gym worker Lou (Kristen Stewart) falls hard for bodybuilding drifter Jackie (Katy O'Brian), who's on her way to compete in Las Vegas. Lou's estranged father, Lou Sr. (Ed Harris), is a violent gangster who runs the local shooting range, where Jackie gets a job. Her sister, Beth (Jena Malone), is married to abusive dirtbag JJ (Dave Franco). So it's no wonder Lou's obsessed with Jackie's immense physical power. But when she starts supplying her new lover with steroids, Jackie's simmering rage threatens to engulf them all.

If *Saint Maud* explored the private sanctuaries of its female characters, *Love Lies Bleeding* puts them in very public, very male spaces, where they find themselves under constant scrutiny and, often, in danger. When Jackie shrugs off the advances of another bodybuilder, he punches her full-on in the face; Lou Sr. fires a gun over her shoulder for wasting his time on the job; and JJ is both vindictive and pathetic - quite an achievement for the usually charming Franco. But all these bruised male egos are nothing in the face of Jackie's physicality, the ultimate special effect.

It's an incredibly visceral work. When the steroids hit, Glass moves in close on Jackie's glistening skin as it creaks and clicks like something from Julia Ducournau's *Titane*. The no-holds-barred sex scenes, meanwhile, are followed by acts of sudden, face-splitting violence. And when Jackie begins to disassociate, she sees nightmarish images of black-eyed demons and vomit-spattered rebirth that might have come straight from Glass' debut.

It's a lot for one movie, maybe too much, with the more outré moments threatening to unstitch the tapestry rather than adding to it. But the actors – particularly the two leads – are excellent; Clint Mansell's score throbs with purpose; and Ben Fordesman's cinematography turns the desert from paradise to hellscape on a dime. More fever dream than film, *Love Lies Bleeding* shows that Glass is the real deal. Who knows what sights she has to show us next? **MATT GLASBY**

**THE VERDICT** Rose Glass' sophomore effort is both neon-drenched desert noir and primal roar of righteous rage.




LIONSGATE, CURZON, KALEIDOSCOPE, PEGGADILLO, COSMIC CAT, UNIVERSAL



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## KIDNAPPED 12A

★★★☆☆ **OUT 26 APRIL** CINEMAS, CURZON HOME CINEMA

Veteran Italian director Marco Bellocchio (*Fists in the Pocket*, *The Traitor*) here dramatises a shameful event in Papal history. In 19th-century Bologna, six-year-old Jewish boy Edgardo (Enea Sala in his film debut) is snatched from his family to be raised Catholic in Rome, when it emerges that a maid baptised him as a baby. Handsomely lensed, acted and furnished at every turn, it's an admirable endeavour but a little too staid to truly get the blood pumping. Interestingly, Spielberg once toyed with the idea of bringing this story to the screen.

**JAMIE GRAHAM**

## LASSIE: A NEW ADVENTURE PG

★★★☆☆ **OUT 3 MAY** CINEMAS

Cinema's most famous dog sniffs out a mystery in this gentle follow-up to *Lassie Come Home* from director Hanno Olderdissen. Dubbed into English from its native German, the story finds intrepid collie Lassie investigating the disappearance of several pedigree chums, assisted by best friend Flo (Nico Marischka) and terrier Pippa. Set in picturesque rural Italy, it's a sedate outing for the dog detective, with perky performances from canine and human alike. The story packs few surprises, but the visuals delight, and at least the dogs aren't CGI.

**JOEL HARLEY**

## OUR MOTHERS 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 10 MAY** CINEMAS

Winner of the Caméra d'Or five years ago, César Diaz's debut feature tackles the Guatemalan genocide, otherwise known as the Silent Holocaust. His film centres on Armando Espitia's Ernesto, a forensic anthropologist whose investigations unearth a surprising familial connection – one that puts him at odds with his own mother. Even as Ernesto faces resistance from those reluctant to confront past atrocities, his journey feels underwhelming and bizarrely slight. Such vital subject matter deserves better: by the final excavation, you'll wish Diaz himself had dug as deeply.

**CHRIS SCHILLING**

## MUCH ADO ABOUT DYING 15

★★★★☆ **OUT 3 MAY** CINEMAS

Shot over a five-year period, this is a clear-eyed and poignant portrait of ageing, caregiving and dying, courtesy of British documentary filmmaker Simon Chambers. The latter reluctantly becomes the principal carer to his gay octogenarian uncle David, a Shakespeare-loving former actor and drama teacher who lives alone in a leaking, mouse-infested London flat. While *Much Ado about Dying* reveals the glaring inadequacies of the UK's elderly care system, it also celebrates its subject's optimism and charm as he takes centre stage in the final act of his life. **TOM DAWSON**

'Come here often?'

# MONKEY MAN 18

## Dev Patel is all grown up...

★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

**Hats off to Dev Patel. That the adorkable *Slumdog Millionaire* star has grown into a commanding leading man is the equivalent of the kid who had sand kicked in his face hitting the gym to sculpt himself into a powerhouse. And now, as star, director, producer and co-writer of *Monkey Man*, he's morphed into a one-man army.**

We meet Patel's monkey-masked Kid in the fictional Indian city of Yatana. Battered senseless in an underground fight ring, he's also reeling from childhood memories of his mother's death at the hands of Rana (Sikandar Kher), a police chief controlled by corrupt politicians in league with a religious guru. Kid is at the bottom of the caste system, the weight of the elite pressing down on him. But his torments and traumas are about to erupt in a roaring rampage of revenge.

*Monkey Man* is intense. Maybe *too* intense, its two-hour run time pummelling viewers with deafening sound design, jagged cuts and shallow-focus close-ups. The bouts seem to shove viewers between the fighters as they go at each other with fists, feet, elbows, knees and teeth. Too much of a good thing? Perhaps, but the result knocks you out. And though Patel borrows from *Commando*, Rambo, Bruce Lee movies, *The Raid* and John Wick, he adds enough cultural twists and jabs at weaponised, monetised faith to keep *Monkey Man* fresh. A brutal triumph. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

**THE VERDICT** Gruelling, exhausting, thrilling: there's a lot going on in Dev Patel's directorial debut. Steel yourself.

'I think you're right, a shirt would have looked better'

# MADE IN ENGLAND: THE FILMS OF POWELL AND PRESSBURGER TBC

## A matter of movie love...

★★★★★ **OUT 10 MAY** CINEMAS

**Martin Scorsese fronts this personal journey through the work of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, whose creative partnership spanned from 1939–72. In the 1940s and 1950s, notably, the duo were responsible for some of the most remarkable films in the history of British cinema.**

Entranced as a child by Powell's *The Thief of Bagdad*, Scorsese has championed their work for decades, becoming close friends with Powell and praising their ability to make 'subversive commercial films'. His editor Thelma Schoonmaker, here executive producer, is Powell's widow.

Directed by David Hinton, *Made in England* is straightforward in its construction: Scorsese serves as a narrator, and there are film clips alongside archival interviews. The veteran director explains how specific sequences have impacted on his own filmmaking, giving the example of the preparations for the duel in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* influencing Jake LaMotta's delayed walk to the ring in *Raging Bull*.

Attention is paid to some of the duo's less successful films, including *Gone to Earth*. What's emphasised is the European aspect of their productions, with many key collaborators refugees from Nazi persecution, giving their British films an internationalist dimension. **TOM DAWSON**

**THE VERDICT** A treat for film-lovers, as Scorsese expertly guides us through the Powell and Pressburger back catalogue.

## MALUM 18

★★★★★ **OUT 26 APRIL** CINEMAS

Director and co-writer Anthony DiBlasi remakes his own 2014 movie *Last Shift*, only noisier and gaudier. Essentially smashing together John Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13* and *Prince of Darkness*, *Malum* plonks rookie cop Jessica (Jessica Sula, *Split*) in a decommissioned police station for the night, besieged by a vicious cult mysteriously linked to her father's death. The odd vivid vision escalates to a volley of violence, but it's really not as fun as it sounds, containing little of Carpenter's suspenseful atmosphere and formal expertise, just a barrage of jump scares. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

## THE ALMOND AND THE SEAHORSE 15

★★★★★ **OUT 10 MAY** CINEMAS

Adapted from Kaite O'Reilly's play, this well-meaning misfire stars script writer and co-director Celyn Jones as Joe, a man with amnesia whose wife, Sarah (Rebel Wilson), struggles with his condition. Likewise, Toni (Charlotte Gainsbourg) is failing to cope with her cellist partner Gwen (Trine Dyrholm), who has similar memory issues. So goes the set-up for a film mired in unlikely contrivances. Wilson shows willing in a rare dramatic turn, and Jones' portrayal of memory loss is touching, but otherwise he and co-director Tom Stern fumble the film's emotional impact. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

## STEPHEN TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 26 APRIL** CINEMAS

Inspired by the first filmed crime reconstruction, 1901's *Arrest Of Goudie*, Melanie Manchot's docudrama likewise seeks to blend fiction and fact. Stephen Giddings plays both compulsive gambler Tom Goudie in a film within the film, and himself in auditions, rehearsals and roundtable discussions – outlining his own experiences with addiction alongside non-pro actors and a clutch of former soap stars. Despite Giddings' best efforts, the fictional element struggles to convince; it's the real-world anecdotes that provide all the most absorbing drama. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

## JERICHO RIDGE TBC

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS
**29 APRIL** DIGITAL

Making the most of modest resources, this largely single-location siege movie is the directorial feature debut of British writer Will Gilbey (*Rise of the Footsoldier*). Set in Washington State but shot in Kosovo, and featuring a largely English cast playing American, it stars Nikki Amuka-Bird as a harassed deputy sheriff defending her lonely HQ from armed invaders over the course of an action-packed evening. Amuka-Bird makes a fierce protagonist, the firefights are intense and Michael Socha shines as an abusive prisoner. An impressive first try. **MATT GLASBY**



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## TWO TICKETS TO GREECE TBC

★★★☆☆ **OUT 17 MAY** CINEMAS

Written and directed by French filmmaker Marc Fitoussi, this comedy of middle-aged female friendship is set in the summer of 2019. Recently divorced and uptight Blandine (Olivia Côte) reunites with her best friend from school, the free-spirited and extrovert Magalie (Laure Calamy), and the temperamentally opposed duo head off together on holiday to the sun-drenched island of Amorgos. Engaging performances from the leads offset a formulaic screenplay, and a bandana-sporting Kristin Scott Thomas amuses as a hippie jewellery-maker on Mykonos. **TOM DAWSON**

## TIGER STRIPES TBC

★★★★☆ **OUT 17 MAY** CINEMAS

Mixing body horror with coming-of-age tension, Amanda Nell Eu's unique debut plays like a Malaysian answer to *Ginger Snaps* (2000). Drawing upon regional myths and culture, Eu's folktale-leaning drama centres on 12-year-old Zaffan (Zafreen Zairizal), a rebellious schoolgirl who is the first in her class to hit puberty. As her body changes, she becomes isolated from her peers and undergoes a striking metamorphosis. While the symbolism can be heavy-handed, homespun visual effects and intriguing currents of mysticism lend *Tiger Stripes* a distinctive and ambitious vibe. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

## BLACKBIRD BLACKBIRD BLACKBERRY TBC

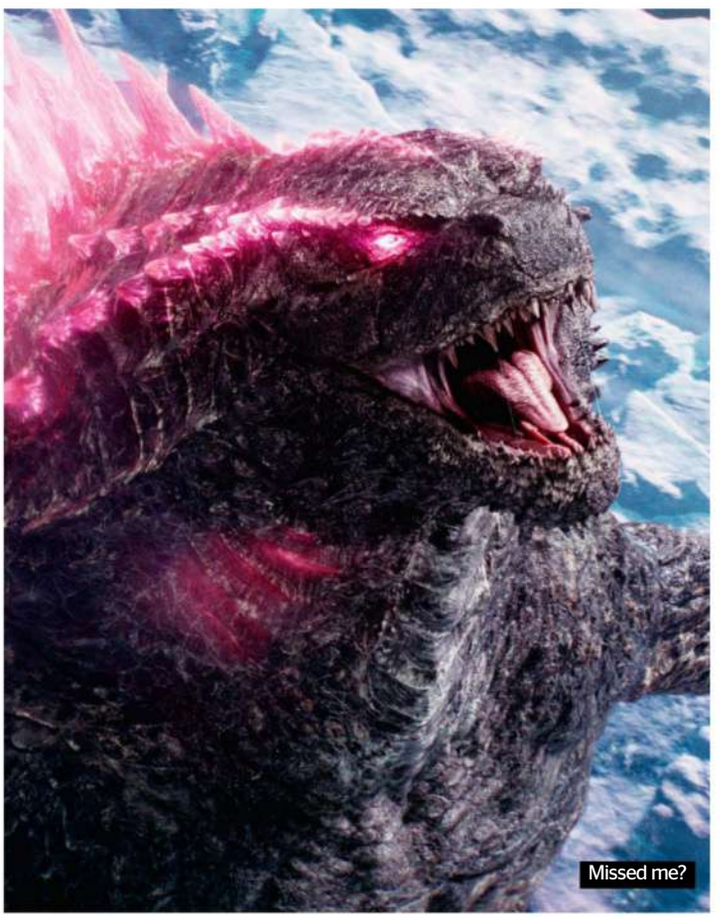
★★★☆☆ **OUT 3 MAY** CINEMAS

Wry, sensuous and surprisingly subversive, this gentle romance from Georgian director Elene Naveriani finds stoical rural spinster Etero (Eka Chavleishvili) plunging into an illicit affair with married delivery driver Murman (Temiko Chichinadze). A sharp, no-shit-taken performance from Chavleishvili highlights Etero's fierce hunger for freedom. The film's meandering pace gives Naveriani ample room to explore Etero's self-willed transformation, alongside a pointed take on the tough lives of Georgian women. **KATE STABLES**

## HUNT HER, KILL HER 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 26 APRIL** CINEMAS

Natalie Terrazzino and a vast warehouse are the MVPs in this mixed-bag survival thriller from directors Greg Swinson and Ryan Thiessen. Terrazzino's Karen is a just-divorced mum working the night-shift in a factory. When masked thugs bust in, she uses the labyrinthine environment and various tools to fight back. Over a naggingly laggy 89 minutes, Karen's sufferings make for tough viewing and the b-word is drearily overused. What fun there is lies in seeing Karen turn the tables, resourcefully: one raw scrap lends new meaning to the phrase 'toilet plunger'. **KEVIN HARLEY**

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# GODZILLA X KONG: THE NEW EMPIRE 12A

## Sexy beasts...

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

**The uneasy alliance forged in 2021's *Godzilla vs Kong* is tapped again in returning director Adam Wingard's gleeful smackdown. *GxK* is loaded with more colossal beasties, nods to the Showa-era Godzilla films and lots of goo. Just don't expect the humans to match the monsters' expressiveness.**

Wingard's film picks up after the destruction of Mechagodzilla and Kong's departure to the subterranean Hollow Earth, leaving Godzilla battling beasts on the surface. Trouble is, it takes an hour to explain how we're going to get to the atomic-blasting fisticuffs we came for.

Saddled with exposition-heavy dialogue that can only intentionally be this flat, the plot follows Dr. Ilene Andrews (Rebecca Hall), Bernie (Brian Tyree Henry) and Trapper (Dan Stevens) to Hollow Earth after Andrews' adopted daughter Jia (Kaylee Hottle) experiences visions.

Alongside parallel stories of parenthood and an *Avatar*-esque commentary on colonialism, *GxK* majors in disposable fun, vivid colours, *Guardians*-style needle drops and impressive global fights. Its big bad, the Skar King, is a decently nasty piece of work in a world of XXL personalities, some of which shimmer with a CG iridescence that is at times truly beautiful. The humans are merely ciphers and a means to further plot, but if you're buying a ticket for the behemoth battles, you'll get your money's worth. **JANE CROWTHER**

**THE VERDICT** Sluggish set-up aside, *GxK*'s jungle rumble is fun while it lasts, easily forgotten when it's over.

The nun and only: Nell Tiger Free stars as nun-in-training Margaret

# THE FIRST OMEN 15

## Top nun...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

**It's a nun-derful life at the cinema these days. You wait years for a sister-and-Satan movie, and *The Nun II* and *Immaculate* materialise. But this smartly chilling, 70s-styled revisit to the Omen franchise is a cut above.**

A classy prequel shot with understated atmosphere, *The First Omen* propels naive novitiate Margaret (Nell Tiger Free) into a creepy Catholic orphanage in 1971 Rome, where she bonds with disturbed orphan Carlita (Nicole Sorace) over their abusive childhoods.

First-time feature director Arkasha Stevenson (*Channel Zero*) sets a tense, chilling mood, bringing back the psychological horror of the 1976 film. This gives Margaret's visions of devil claws and mysterious bestial rites a useful ambiguity – is she relapsing into mental instability, as Sonia Braga's shrewd abbess insists? But when disgraced Father Brennan (Ralph Ineson) reveals a Catholic sect's plan to breed the Antichrist from an orphan, the rope-swinging, pole-flying callbacks to *The Omen* ramp up the film from arty restraint to burgeoning body horror.

Stevenson crafts something female-driven and fresh from the film's heritage, as Margaret digs into orphanage files (and its terrifying crypt) in a bid to save Carlita. Like *Immaculate*, there's a strong message about post-Roe-vs-Wade female bodily autonomy, especially in the gory, feisty finale. Free's fabulously no-holds-barred performance keeps things swinging along in high style. **KATE STABLES**

**THE VERDICT** This female-centred Omen prequel is devilishly good at keeping its nun on the run.

## OMEN (AUGURE) 15

★★★★★ **OUT 26 APRIL** CINEMAS

Belgian-Congolese rapper Baloji directs this unusual examination of characters all accused of witchcraft and sorcery. The first is Koffi (Marc Zinga), who returns to DR Congo with his white fiancée Alice (Lucie Debay) to reunite with his estranged family. What follows is an increasingly bizarre and fractured narrative, as Baloji examines the tensions between modernity and ancient traditions. Visually it's splendidly unsettling, but the film's anthology-like nature – as Koffi's sister and mother enter the fray, alongside young local Paco (Marcel Otete Kabeya) – loses focus at crucial times. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

## THAT THEY MAY FACE THE RISING SUN 15

★★★★★ **OUT 26 APRIL** CINEMAS

Rural Ireland is both the setting and the subject of Pat Collins' contemplative adaptation of John McGahern's award-winning novel, a film that studiously takes its time as it charts a year in the lives of a writer (Barry Ward) and an artist (Anna Bederke) who have left London in search of a more peaceful existence as part of a lakeside community. The wedding of one neighbour and the passing of another are the primary developments in this quietly moving celebration of the quotidian, the mundane and the ineffable beauty of nature. **NEIL SMITH**

## RED HERRING TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 3 MAY** CINEMAS, DIGITAL

How do you cope with the certainty and imminence of death? Diagnosed with a terminal brain tumour, Kit Vincent responds by picking up his camera in this achingly intimate documentary. Discussing his illness with his partner and separated parents, Vincent refuses to tidy up the uncomfortable exchanges had. Instead, flashes of humour – and his dad's conversion to Judaism – add moments of warmth, before Vincent's declared determination to give loved ones 'something to remember me by' emerges as a profoundly affecting mission statement. **KEVIN HARLEY**

## SCARYGIRL TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 26 APRIL** CINEMAS

Based on an ever-growing multimedia brand, this Aussie 3D animation follows young Arkie (Jillian Nguyen) on her quest to unite a divided world, using a knack for technology and one tentacle arm. Directed by Ricard Cussó and Tania Vincent, the coming-of-age adventure features a prolific cast of voice talents, including Anna Torv, Tim Minchin, Deborah Mailman and Sam Neill – the latter put to good use as the villainous Doctor Maybee. The aggressively jumbled character designs initially grate, but creative visuals and a heartwarming message save the day. **JOEL HARLEY**

20TH CENTURY STUDIOS, AYA FILMS, CONIC, BULLDOG, VERTIGO, SONY, SIGNATURE, APPLE, DOGWOOF, NETFLIX



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## GHOSTBUSTERS: FROZEN EMPIRE 12A

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Co-written by Jason Reitman and Gil Kenan, who also directs, this watchable reboot sequel shifts the action from Oklahoma to the saga's spiritual home of New York. Callie Spengler (Carrie Coon), her kids (Mckenna Grace, Finn Wolfhard) and ex-teacher Gary (Paul Rudd) are in the firehouse, keeping the city ghost-free when a mysterious brass orb causes problems. The sharp script, creepy antagonist and OG stars (Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Ernie Hudson, Annie Potts) please but the overcrowded stage results in an unwieldy, if likeable, brand extension. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

## BUTTERFLY TALE U

★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

A Canadian-German production, this sweet computer-animated children's film captures a day in a bug's life as two monarch butterflies, one-winged Patrick (Mena Massoud) and vertigo-fearing Jennifer (*She-Hulk*'s Tatiana Maslany), bond with caterpillar Marty (Lucinda Davis). But they're all excluded from the flutter's annual migration due to their inability to fly. While director Sophie Roy and the writers lead with messages of inclusivity and conservation, they're hampered by flat visuals and an uninspiring story. Despite noble motivations, this leaden adventure never quite takes flight. **JOEL HARLEY**

## STEVE! (MARTIN): A DOCUMENTARY IN 2 PIECES TBC

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** APPLE TV+

From the 'wild and craaazy guy' of the 70s to the grumpy guy of *Only Murders in the Building*, Steve Martin has reinvented himself successfully for nearly 50 years. Morgan Neville's affectionate, access-all-areas doc tries and fails bravely to cram Martin's evolution into an overstuffed film of two unwieldy halves. The first half is cracking, tracing Martin's rise from teen Disneyland magician to comic idol, but the bitty – if intimate – second half sorely misses the smart analysis that Martin's many-phased career deserves. **KATE STABLES**

## CATCHING FIRE: THE STORY OF ANITA PALLENBERG TBC

★★★★☆ **OUT 17 MAY** CINEMAS

Andy Warhol, Roger Vadim, three of the Rolling Stones: for most of her 75 years, the subject of Alexis Bloom and Svetlana Zill's documentary was defined for some by the men she worked, partied and slept with. *Catching Fire* serves as an overdue corrective to that androcentric narrative, using film clips, home movies and Pallenberg's unpublished memoir (read by Scarlett Johansson) to reappraise and recontextualise an artist, actor and mother whose screen credits range from cult classics *Barbarella* and *Performance* to *Absolutely Fabulous*. **NEIL SMITH**

The prince and his private secretary on the eve of a life-changing interview

## SCOOP 15

### Spare slice...

★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** NETFLIX

**Hotter than a Sloppy Giuseppe from Pizza Express in Woking, Prince Andrew's disastrous 2019 *Newsnight* interview gobsmacked audiences and rocked the monarchy. This punchy behind-the-scenes drama does a great job of unpicking the underdog story of how booking producer Sam McAlister (a scrappy Billie Piper) captured the scoop of the decade.**

Director Philip Martin gives Sam's canny chasing of royal-related Jeffrey Epstein tip-offs a *Working Girl* (1988) vibe, as posh *Newsnight* journos scoff at the impossibility of an interview. And rather than spoofing Rufus Sewell's bluff Prince Andrew, the film digs into the blinkered entitlement that led him and private secretary Amanda Thirsk (Keeley Hawes) to try changing his 'Randy Andy' reputation with a PR offensive.

Once McAlister reels in the royal, the film has a thriller's pace. In trademark 'Netflix London' style, urgent mobile calls outside famous buildings and arguments in glass-walled offices ensue as the *Newsnight* team war-game the top-secret, high-stakes encounter.

In the gunfight-style tension of the interview, Gillian Anderson gives an uncanny portrayal of Emily Maitlis. Yet even she is outclassed by Sewell's narcissistic but oddly charismatic prince, indulged by Palace yes-people into thinking he could charm the nation. There's another how-*Newsnight*-nobbled-the-palace project in production, but *Scoop* will take some beating. **KATE STABLES**

**THE VERDICT** This jaw-dropping tale of how *Newsnight* ended Prince Andrew's career is a right royal scandal.

Ewan energy: Disposing of a dead body in *Shallow Grave* and defending Naboo in *The Phantom Menace*

# SHALLOW GRAVE 15

# STAR WARS: EPISODE I – THE PHANTOM MENACE PG

## From Edinburgh to Tatooine...

1994 ★★★★☆ **OUT 10 MAY** CINEMAS
1999 ★★★☆☆ **OUT 3 MAY** CINEMAS

**Oddly parallel themes of trust/friendship aside, these two bookends of Ewan McGregor's 90s run sit galaxies apart. Reissued, however, they offer dual proof that his light-speed lift-off was merited.**

Aided by his Disney+ return to Obi-Wan Kenobi, it's largely McGregor who allows us to recall *Menace* with (guarded, mind) nostalgia. Beyond the prequel's much-noted issues, McGregor's winning on-screen presence helped offset George Lucas' CG overload. And the three-way saber stand-off ranks alongside the saga's finest dust-ups, especially seen in cinemas with John Williams' *Duel of the Fates* blazing.

Rewinding five years, Danny Boyle's *Shallow Grave* climaxed with a bloodier three-person scrap. As three flatmates clash over a corpse and some cash, *Grave* holds up as a taut, stylish exercise in 90s suspense, acted to the hilt by Christopher Eccleston, Kerry Fox and McGregor. As Alex, McGregor is near-relatable yet boldly repellent, all laddish energy and callow cackle. Pity flatsharing hopeful Cameron, with his geek-friendly Forbidden Planet bag, who couldn't know he was facing the Doctor and Obi-Wan. But you can't miss the star wattage. **KEVIN HARLEY**

**THE VERDICT** Youthful Ewan brings warmth and wild-card vim to two 90s hits.

## BIG BANANA FEET 12A

1977 ★★★★☆
**OUT 10 MAY** CINEMAS **20 MAY** DVD, BD
**EXTRAS** ★★★☆☆ Interview, Featurettes, Booklet

Rarely shown since its original release nearly five decades ago, this newly restored fly-on-the-wall documentary follows Scottish comedian Billy Connolly on his 1975 tour of Dublin and Belfast at the height of the Troubles. What follows is a nimble portrait of the Glaswegian former shipyard welder on the brink of stardom. Wearing the outsized banana-shaped footwear of the title, the banjo-playing stand-up displays his charm and comic prowess in front of expectant audiences. **TOM DAWSON**

## MANSION OF THE DOOMED 15

1976 ★★☆☆☆ **OUT 6 MAY** BD
**EXTRAS** ★★★☆☆ Documentary, Featurette, Booklet

Available in the UK for the first time, Michael Pataki's 1976 video nasty is so tame it only warrants a 15 certificate these days. Featuring a stacked cast (Richard Basehart, Gloria Grahame, Lance Henriksen), plus future maestro 'Stanley Winston' on make-up, it follows an LA surgeon (Basehart) as he resorts to increasingly unethical means to restore his daughter's sight. While the film itself looks great, and there are striking images of eyeless victims, the whole enterprise creaks like a dungeon door. **MATT GLASBY**

## RAGING BULL 15

1980 ★★★★★ **OUT 20 MAY** 4K UHD, BD
**EXTRAS** ★★★★★ Commentaries, Video essays, Documentary, Featurettes, Interviews, Booklet

Scorsese's bruising masterpiece comes out fighting on 4K Blu-ray. Not only does the restored black-and-white cinematography pack an almighty wallop, but when it comes to extras Criterion's disc is a true heavyweight champ. On top of repackaged Blu-ray goodies, including a trio of commentaries and a four-part making-of, this upgrade adds a pair of perceptive visual essays and gives the real Vikki LaMotta her say (no matter how brief) courtesy of a vintage TV interview alongside actor Cathy Moriarty. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

## ROME, OPEN CITY 12A

1945 ★★★★★ **OUT 17 MAY** CINEMAS

Reissued as part of a two-month BFI Southbank season devoted to Italian neorealism, director Roberto Rossellini's landmark Resistance drama was shot under exceptionally difficult circumstances in Rome in early 1945, while World War Two still raged in the north of Italy. Blending fact and fiction, and using professional and non-professional actors, *Rome, Open City* documents the efforts of various Roman partisans (whether Christian or Marxist) to evade capture during the brutal German occupation. Nearly 80 years later, the film's urgency and humanity remain undimmed. **TOM DAWSON**

101 FILMS, 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS, BFI, DISNEY, EUREKA, ICON, PARAMOUNT, PARK CIRCUS, SPIRIT



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## DOGFIGHT 15

1991 ★★★☆☆ **OUT 6 MAY** BD

**EXTRAS** ★★★☆☆ Commentary, Interviews, Essay

A moment of casual cruelty leads to a young Marine and a coffee-shop waitress making unexpected connections on the night before he ships to Vietnam in Nancy Savoca's bittersweet romance. As pat as it sounds, multifaceted performances from River Phoenix and Lili Taylor turn the story into something more complex and painfully uncertain. In the extras, Savoca, Taylor and Mary Harron address studio concerns over the film's commercial prospects, with *She's Interesting* (!) and *Nice Personality* (!!) seriously proposed as alternate titles. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

## THE DREAMERS 18

2003 ★★★☆☆ **OUT 13 MAY** 4K UHD

**EXTRAS** ★★★☆☆ Commentary, Featurettes, Interviews, B-roll, Art cards

Sex and cinephilia are the driving forces of Bernardo Bertolucci and writer Gilbert Adair's Paris 1968 story, a film more fixated on matters personal than political. The result is a mixed rumpus, most notable for Eva Green's film debut as one third of a ménage à trois getting naked and talking shot – Keaton or Chaplin? – in a spiffy apartment. The fluid direction, handsome furnishings and fine song choices are easy on the eyes and ears, but the trio's antics seem wearyingly self-absorbed compared with what's going on outside. **KEVIN HARLEY**

## THE CAT AND THE CANARY PG

1927 ★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** BD

**EXTRAS** ★★★★☆ Commentaries, Visual essay, Interviews, Play extracts, Booklet

If not the first 'old dark house' movie, then Paul Leni's silent horror comedy is surely the most influential (that familiar fright-film standby of a corridor full of billowing curtains got its start here). This new 4K restoration reveals it to be among the most stylish, too, the German filmmaker mixing expressionist symbolism with a fluidity of camera movement. Even the film's text cards refuse to sit still, thanks to Walter Anthony's delightfully loopy animated intertitles. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

## FOOTPRINTS 12

1975 ★★★☆☆ **OUT 29 APRIL** BD, DIGITAL

**EXTRAS** ★★★☆☆ Alt versions, Commentary, Intro, Interviews

Fitting in at the more outré end of 1970s Italian pop cinema, Luigi Bazzoni's cult-ish oddity sees an amnesiac translator (played by Florinda Bolkan) chase after her double after being tormented by visions of Klaus Kinski; a puzzle-like yarn develops, marrying arthouse technique and mystery thriller expectations to surreal and atmospheric effect. This Shameless Films release comes with three cuts of the film, retrospective interviews and historian Rachael Nisbet's commentary. **MARTYN CONTERIO**

# THE CROW 18

## Back in black...

1994 ★★★★☆ **OUT 6 MAY** 4K UHD

**EXTRAS** ★★★☆☆ Commentaries, Featurettes, Interview, Profile, Extended/deleted scenes

**T*he Crow* is best known for the terrible fate that befell Brandon Lee on set. The 28-year-old actor and son of martial arts icon Bruce Lee was killed by a prop gun at the end of the shoot, and the film was released posthumously.**

Watching the film 30 years later on this 4K Blu-ray restoration is a deeply sad experience, particularly given that Lee is a stunning on-screen presence; dynamic, haunting and possessing a balletic elegance even in the most brutal of scenes. He plays the titular Crow/Eric Draven, a rock musician who comes back from the dead to seek revenge after a violent gang murder him and his girlfriend.

Based on the 1989 comic-book series, the film adopts its source material's dark Goth aesthetic, which is further enhanced by an achingly cool soundtrack featuring The Cure, Rage Against the Machine and Nine Inch Nails. Much of the supporting cast is solid but Michael Wincott, as crime boss Top Dollar, steals scene after scene with a series of curled snarls and a voice so gravelly it sounds like he starts each day by gargling a bucket of rusty nails. With a remake on the way, it's a perfect time to revisit the original, but time should be set aside afterwards to mourn one of cinema's biggest tragedies.

**LEILA LATIF**

**THE VERDICT** Thirty years on, *The Crow* remains one of the best films you'll wish was never made.

Brandon Lee stars as Eric Draven

Indy and his pals keep a lookout for a third season

A VERY SPECIAL EPISODE

**SOMME, EARLY AUGUST 1916**
**S2** 1992
'I think it's very important for people to see in terms of understanding what it was like to fight in World War One,' says Lucas of this relatively unflinching (for prime-time TV) episode detailing Indy's experience of trench warfare while attached to a decimated Belgian unit during the Battle of the Somme.

## CLASSIC TV
# THE YOUNG INDIANA JONES CHRONICLES

### Lessons in his-story...

**1992-96** AVAILABLE ON DVD, DIGITAL

**A few years before George Lucas set about expanding a short piece of exposition from *Return of the Jedi* (1983) into a mixed-results movie trilogy, he had already tried his hand at a prequel to another blockbuster franchise. Reportedly inspired by repeated inquiries from Harrison Ford and Steven Spielberg about Indiana Jones' formative years, Lucas conceived a television show exploring the character's early life.**

But unlike some brand extensions, this was no mere exercise in nostalgia bait. Instead, Lucas had a different ambition for *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*. Befitting a character whose primary source of employment was as a professor of archaeology (even if his cinematic adventures tended to prioritise extracurricular exploits), Lucas' chief desire was to use the show to educate audiences about world history.

To this end the show played like a small-screen *Zelig* (1983) with the young Indy – played by either Corey Carrier (ages eight-10) or Sean Patrick Flanery (ages 16-21) – travelling the world during the early decades of the 20th century and encountering such real-world historical personalities as T.E. Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway, Al Capone and Pablo Picasso. Shot on location across 35 countries, *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* was as lavish as any of Lucasfilm's feature productions, with each episode costing in the region of $1.5m.

While the series attracted plenty of star power both in front of and behind the camera (Nicolas Roeg and Mike Newell both directed episodes) and numerous industry accolades (including six Emmys), when it came to viewers it just didn't have the same pulling power as Indy's cinematic adventures. Maybe the original non-sequential episodic approach to the series timeline was too off-putting for mainstream audiences. Or maybe they simply wanted (as *Entertainment Weekly* put it) 'more whip-cracking and less lecturing'. Either way, the outcome was the same: ABC pulled the plug after two seasons, though the much smaller The Family Channel played home to four subsequent TV films.

And Lucas wasn't entirely done with it. For its VHS release, the pioneering filmmaker oversaw a re-edit, using newly shot footage to pair individual episodes into feature-length films, now running in a chronological order and retitled *The Adventures of Young Indiana Jones*. Perhaps the closest Lucas got to his educational Holy Grail, though, was the series of 94 documentaries commissioned to support the show on DVD, which would go on to be used as teaching aids by some educators. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

ALAMY, PARAMOUNT



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# EXTRAS

PRINT

## THE LAVENDER HILL MOB POP ART

**OUT NOW**

Pop-art specialist Art & Hue's celebration of 75 years of Ealing comedies (see *Extras*, issue 348) continues with a collection inspired by the studio's 1951 crime caper. Choose from individual portraits of the Mob itself (Alec Guinness, Stanley Holloway, Sid James, Alfie Bass), co-star Sydney Tafler and a pre-superstardom Audrey Hepburn. There's also a group shot of the gold-swiping gang and a new take on the original 'clinch' poster. An official collab with Studiocanal, the prints are available in three sizes and 20 colour options. Leg it to artandhue.com.

COLLECTIBLES

## STANLEY KUBRICK TUBBZ

**OUT TBC APRIL**

Feels like we need a blast of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to accompany this epochal moment in collectibles history, as four icons from Stanley Kubrick movies become cosplaying ducks. It's surely the tribute the exacting auteur always wanted. There's *Full Metal Jacket*'s J.T. 'Joker' Davis (with 'Born to Quack' helmet), *2001*'s David Bowman, *A Clockwork Orange*'s Alex DeLarge, and that ultimate bathroom-botherer, *The Shining*'s Jack Torrance. Can we have Barry Lyn-duck next? 'Bill' from *Eyes Wide Shut*? Get your axe in gear at tubbz.com.

TOY/COLLECTIBLE

## LEGO GOTHAM CITY SKYLINE

**OUT NOW**

Inspired by the opening titles of *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992–95), this 4,210-piece Gotham City-scape offers even more than meets the eye. There are 15 panels that, when removed, reveal episode-specific details of the interiors of Wayne Manor, the Batcave and Arkham Asylum. Four minifigures (Bats, Joker, Harley Quinn, Catwoman) are included, plus a removable Batmobile and Batwing. Even better than all that, there are two sets of instructions included, so you and a sidekick can build at the same time. Glide over to lego.com.

COLLECTIBLES

## STAR WARS MAY THE 4TH RANGE

**OUT 4 MAY**

For some reason, 4 May still isn't a globally recognised public holiday. But you can celebrate the big day by splashing some galactic credits on items including a limited-release commemorative pin and a tumbler featuring R2, 3PO and Boba Fett. And to mark the 25th anniversary of *The Phantom Menace*, products include a pin, a Padme headband and a collectible bust of Darth Maul (being cut in half has never slowed him down). Chop-chop to disneystore.co.uk!

**MATTHEW LEYLAND**

ART & HUE, DISNEY, LEGO, NUMSKULL

## FRESH SPINS

Retro muscle and old haunts revived...

**LOVE LIES BLEEDING**
★★★★☆
After TV detours (*Peacemaker*, *Doom Patrol*), Clint Mansell returns to cinemas with a retro-synth-y swagger. Echoes of Carpenter/Fiedel reverberate through Mansell's atmospheric score for Rose Glass' pulp-noir cosmic romance, with opener *Louville* setting the tone so strongly you can almost taste the sweat. The title track's brooding punch and the propulsive *Penalty = Prison* max mood and muscle nicely, while *I Fucking Love You, You Idiot* closes the score in celestial style, twinkling like a starry night.

**GHOSTBUSTERS: FROZEN EMPIRE**
★★★☆☆
Who you gonna call? Composer Dario Marianelli answers here, weaving Bernstein homages into modern action stylings to fitfully likeable effect. If *Frozen Empire* is less spry than hoped, with fragments of familiar cues woven into agitated orchestral broadsides, the Phoebe/Melody theme adds flashes of well-developed character. *New Proton Packs* and *The Sewer Dragon* fuse old/new with gusto, too, though it's the wistful *A Tour of the Firehouse* that best stirs the old spirit.

'You know what they call a soundtrack in Paris? *Bande sonore*. With cheese'

# CLASSIC SOUNDTRACK
# PULP FICTION
## Ten retro-cool tunes from QT's game-changer...

***SURF RIDER*, THE LIVELY ONES**
'I think we should be leaving now…' All sax squall, spidery guitars and low-string cool, this surf-swaggering 1963 classic nails the outro duties for Quentin Tarantino's Palme d'Or/Oscar-winner. Morricone goes to California is the rough gist.

***FLOWERS ON THE WALL*, THE STATLER BROTHERS**
After killing Vincent, Butch cracks a rare smile and croons along to the radio. Virginia country crew the Statlers provide the damaged-cowboy ditty, later quoted by Bruce Willis – 'Smokin' cigarettes and watching *Captain Kangaroo*' – in *Die Hard with a Vengeance*.

***COMANCHE*, THE REVELS**
'The gimp's sleepin'…' Tarantino wakes him up to the Revels' surf screeches of sax and sonic violence. He wanted The Knack's *My Sharona* for its bumping rhythm – insert childish snigger – but *Comanche* hits the right splenetic note of spaghetti-westernised aggression.

***LONESOME TOWN*, RICKY NELSON**
While Vincent watches askance, Mia orders a $5 shake to the tune of teen heart-throb Nelson's crooning plaint. Baker Knight wrote the song when he was new to Hollywood, a backstory that sits neatly with Tarantino's movie-meta mischief.

***LET'S STAY TOGETHER*, AL GREEN**
The Rev's soul ballad backs Marsellus' demand that Butch throw the fight. As Marsellus spells out 'a hard motherfucking fact of life' to Willis' poker-faced 'Punchy', Green provides the meltingly hypnotic counterpoint.

***JUNGLE BOOGIE*, KOOL & THE GANG**
Like turning the dial to the radio station in Tarantino's head, Kool's funk workout budges another song out of the opening titles. Giddy horns and grooves issue a message: don't get settled, we're here to keep you on your toes.

***GIRL, YOU'LL BE A WOMAN SOON*, URGE OVERKILL**
Neil Diamond initially didn't want his song tarnished by Tarantino's druggy escapades. But music supervisor Mary Ramos persisted, Diamond buckled and Chicago alt-rockers Urge Overkill banked a killer cover for Mia's bob-flinging, hip-swaying mime.

***SON OF A PREACHER MAN*, DUSTY SPRINGFIELD**
Dusty's ballad unfurls as Vincent chats to Mia over the intercom and chops out some lines. Tarantino considered cutting the scene if he couldn't use the 1968 hit: even now, try imagining it any other way.

***YOU NEVER CAN TELL*, CHUCK BERRY**
'Take it away!' As Mia and Vincent throw shapes to Tarantino's unfettered directions ('Watusi! Hitchhiker! Batman!'), Berry's buoyant rock'n'roll tribute to teenage love helps bank an insouciant landmark of 90s movie cool, made from the cheesiest moves going.

***MISIRLOU*, DICK DALE & HIS DEL-TONES**
Described by Tarantino as 'a gauntlet' for his film to live up to, surf-guitar radicalist Dale's eruptive overhaul of a Mediterranean folk song sends *Pulp* haring out of the traps post-prologue. Fiery guitars, Morricone horns, primal hollers: now that's getting your attention. **KEVIN HARLEY**

A24 MUSIC, MIRAMAX, SONY MUSIC CLASSICAL



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*Dragon's Dogma 2*: 'Fulfilling the ambitions of a flawed but pioneering original'

# GAMES

## DRAGON'S DOGMA 2

### Scaled up...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** PC, PS5, XBOX SERIES X/S

**Hollywood might seem overly fond of remakes/reboots, but no medium cannibalises its past to the same degree as video games. Yet from cosmetic makeovers to wholesale upgrades, the industry seldom looks beyond the established classics.**

Which makes it doubly refreshing that Capcom resurrected its 2012 action-RPG – more cult fave than all-time great – with director Hideaki Itsuno again at the helm. The title screen makes the developer's intentions plain by forgoing the titular number: this is less a sequel than a chance to use modern hardware to gleefully fulfil the ambitions of a flawed but pioneering original.

You are the Arisen, chosen by a dragon seeking a worthy foe. As such, you'll need to prove yourself, battling goblins, harpies and golems. But you're not alone: this is a single-player quest that feels like a multiplayer game, pairing you with allies from alt-realities to which you'll grow strangely attached. These computer-controlled pawns balance out your weaknesses and can also be sent to other players' worlds, returning with valuable experience that allows them to contribute to thrilling creature fights. The result is an anecdote generator par excellence, and should encourage more publishers to consider using today's tech to realise yesterday's dreams. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

### PRINCESS PEACH: SHOWTIME!

★★★★☆

**OUT NOW** SWITCH

In recent years, Nintendo has attempted to depict the Mushroom Kingdom royal as more than a hapless damsel, but here she finally gets her first proper starring role since 2005's *Super Princess Peach*. This theatrically themed adventure allows her to assume a variety of starring roles, from figure skater to ninja warrior. It compensates for low difficulty with visual brio and inventive stagecraft, providing an empowering showcase for its hero's versatility. **CS**

### UNICORN OVERLORD

★★★★☆

**OUT NOW** PS4/5, SWITCH, XBOX SERIES X/S

The latest from Japanese boutique studio Vanillaware is a wholly absorbing tactical adventure. As an exiled prince you must assemble an army to reclaim your kingdom – forcing tough choices as you decide whether to spare wrongdoers to swell your ranks. The other big decisions are made pre-battle: instead of picking individual attacks, you must choose strategies in advance, watching the ensuing skirmishes play out in all their gorgeously hand-animated glory. **CS**

### MARS AFTER MIDNIGHT

★★★★★

**OUT NOW** PLAYDATE

Restricted to those who own Panic's portable device, Lucas Pope's (*Papers Please*) latest initially appears to be a lighthearted take on his BAFTA-winning solo debut. You monitor the door of a community centre, screening alien visitors based on changing criteria and using a variety of tools to identify them before cleaning up after those you've admitted. By turns hilarious and melancholy, it builds towards a knockout ending. **CS**

© CAPCOM, NINTENDO, SEGA, LUCAS POPE, ANNAPURNA, DEVOLVER

## 2 MORE

Recent thumb-twiddlers...

**OPEN ROADS**

★★☆☆☆

**OUT NOW** PC, PS4/5, SWITCH, XBOX ONE/SERIES X/S

A rare Annapurna misfire, this interactive novella sees mother and daughter Tess (Kaitlyn Dever) and Opal (Keri Russell) embark on an impromptu road trip after a letter reveals a surprising family secret. A winning turn from the ever-reliable Dever fails to rescue a dramatically inert tale whose abrupt ending betrays the game's troubled development.

**PEPPER GRINDER**

★★★★☆

**OUT NOW** PC, SWITCH

Shipwrecked prospector Pepper must recover her stolen treasure using her trusty drill in this unconventional action platformer. The tool serves as both a weapon and a source of locomotion, tunnelling through rocks and piercing enemies alike, while plugging into a variety of devices. The odd fussy challenge aside, it's cleverly designed and – despite its conceit – never boring.

2 MORE

BFIs wide open...

**XALA**
★★★☆☆
Exploring the troubled production history and influence of the 1975 satire *Xala*, James S. Williams' BFI Film Classics book digs below the polemic narrative to dissect the experimental filmmaking within. A blistering critique of postcolonial African society, Ousmane Sembène's luminous work of African cinema rewards deeper reading, which the author traces back to the political and cultural revolution of 70s Senegal. Dissecting the director's versatile use of tone and style, Williams illustrates his points with cogent, informed writing and full-colour movie stills.
**JOEL HARLEY**

**MÄDCHEN IN UNIFORM**
★★★★☆
Released 93 years ago, *Mädchen in Uniform* has fascinated generation after generation, both as a cult favourite and a historic milestone. Barbara Mennel's BFI monograph mounts an engaging analysis of the early German talkie and pioneering lesbian romance. It also does an excellent job of contextualising the cultural and political impact of Leontine Sagan's film, assessing its importance in the canons of world cinema, gay-themed storytelling, and works directed and written by women.
**MARTYN CONTERIO**

## BOOKS

# OSCAR WARS: A HISTORY OF HOLLYWOOD IN GOLD, SWEAT, AND TEARS

★★★★☆ **MICHAEL SCHULMAN** HARPER

**Recent Oscars have been defined by their debacles: 2017's Envelopegate, The Slap from 2022, this year's Al Pacino fumble. As this highly entertaining chronicle of the role the Academy and its awards have played in Hollywood over the past 95 years shows, though, a ceremony cooked up by studio moguls as a placatory sop for their underpaid underlings has always had a habit of making trouble for itself.**

Take 1957 for example, when the non-existent Robert Rich – a front for blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo – was awarded a writing prize. Or 1989, when a camp opening number starring Rob Lowe and Snow White led to Disney calling its lawyers. Schulman sniffs out the rivalries and frictions behind the glitz and glamour: Olivia de Havilland and Joan Fontaine's sibling antagonism, for instance, or the outrage that greeted Gregory Peck's attempts to freshen up the Academy membership. A chapter on the *Shakespeare in Love*–*Saving Private Ryan* dogfight of 1999, meanwhile, delves into the tactics Harvey Weinstein used to nab the Best Picture trophy, and the even nastier things he got up to away from the TV cameras.

As its title implies, this is an Americentric affair that largely ignores the global phenomenon of the Oscars. If you've ever stayed up late to see what's won Best Documentary Short, though, there's something for you within its 600-plus pages. **NEIL SMITH**

Gwyn it: Paltrow at the 1999 Oscars

## HOLLYWOOD PRIDE
★★★☆☆
**ALONSO DURALDE** RUNNING PRESS

'I just went gay all of a sudden!' ad-libbed Cary Grant in *Bringing Up Baby* while wearing a women's fur-trimmed robe. It's one of countless 'queer moments' dissected in an absorbing alt-history that reveals how being hidden from view or denied a voice didn't deter generations of LGBTQ+ actors, writers and craftspeople from leaving their mark on the movies. Some of the terminology employed ('sissies', 'pansies' and so on) might startle, yet this remains a story that deserves, nay demands to be told. **NEIL SMITH**

## MARVEL: WHAT IF... LOKI WAS WORTHY?
★★★★☆
**MADELEINE ROUX** DEL REY

While Marvel's cinematic multiverses have been relatively rocky, the *What If...?* series exploring alt-MCU scenarios has fared better. This first instalment of adult novels under the same banner works equally well, imagining a Loki prank having fatal consequences for Thor. A subsequent banishment, a determined Valkyrie and a revenge-fuelled Tony Stark fill out the fast-paced adventure, with Roux adeptly tapping into the characters' psyches. **MATT LOOKER**

## KES
★★★★☆
**DAVID FORREST** BFI/BLOOMSBURY

Accepting her BAFTA Fellowship earlier this year, Samantha Morton revealed how seeing Ken Loach's *Kes* had 'forever changed' her as a child. Forrest's eloquent study pays further tribute to 'a classic piece of working-class cinema made by working-class people', offering perceptive remarks on its depiction of violent masculinity, its 'searing indictment of the education system' and the manipulations deployed to obtain convincing performances from its inexperienced cast. **NEIL SMITH**

GETTY, HARPERCOLLINS, RUNNING PRESS ADULT, DEL REY, BFI/BLOOMSBURY



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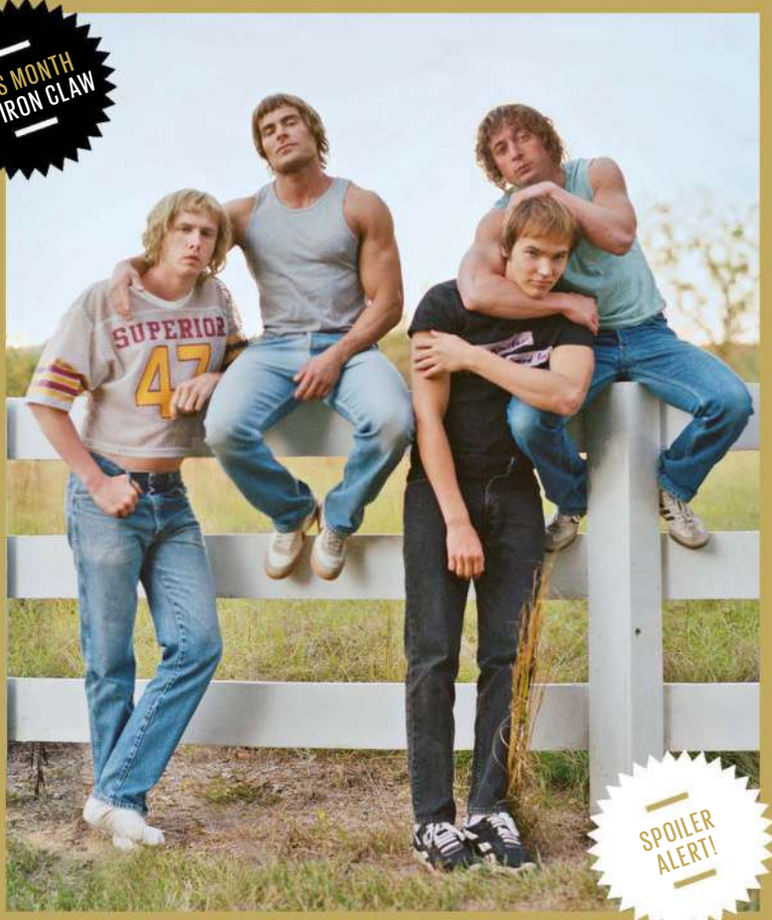
# TOTAL FILM BUFF

CINEMA CELEBRATED AND DEBATED. BOOSTING YOUR MOVIE GENIUS TO SUPERHERO LEVELS...

# IS IT BOLLOCKS?

*Buff* investigates the facts behind movie true stories.

THIS MONTH THE IRON CLAW




SPOILER ALERT!

## Q In reality, was the Von Erich family so beset by a tragic 'curse' that four out of five Von Erich brothers died by early adulthood?

As any biopic must, Sean Durkin's *The Iron Claw* condenses events for a feature-length running time. The Von Erichs (real surname: Adkisson) faced a truly unfathomable amount of tragedy, with firstborn son Jack Jr. dying as a child, David (Harris Dickinson) and Mike (Stanley Simons) dying in their 20s, and Kerry (Jeremy Allen White) dying at 33. While it's true that Kevin (Zac Efron) is the last surviving brother, the film doesn't include an additional real Von Erich brother, Chris, who also died (like Mike and Kerry, by suicide). Durkin has said in an interview with *Vulture* that, 'The movie just couldn't withstand another brother's death.' Some of the brothers' wives and children are also left out for narrative and pacing purposes, but upsettingly, there's further tragedy to unearth there: David and his first wife lost a daughter in infancy. The truth is sadder than fiction, to appropriate a cliché.

**VERDICT MOSTLY NOT BOLLOCKS**

# ALTERNATIVE BOX OFFICE

The biggest movies... STARRING HILARY SWANK

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 01 | **MILLION DOLLAR BABY** 2004 | $216.8M |
| 02 | **P.S. I LOVE YOU** 2007 | $156.8M |
| 03 | **NEW YEAR'S EVE** 2011 | $142M |
| 04 | **THE CORE** 2003 | $73.5M |
| 05 | **THE REAPING** 2007 | $62.8M |
| 06 | **THE BLACK DAHLIA** 2006 | $49.3M |
| 07 | **LOGAN LUCKY** 2017 | $48.5M |
| 08 | **THE GIFT** 2000 | $44.6M |
| 09 | **FREEDOM WRITERS** 2007 | $43.1M |
| 10 | **BOYS DON'T CRY** 1999 | $20.7M |

# ON LOCATION REEL SPOTS BEHIND THE CAMERA

**WHAT?** In period horror *Witchfinder General* (1968), Matthew Hopkins (Vincent Price) oversees the burning of Elizabeth (Maggie Kimberly) in a town square.
**WHERE? The Guildhall, Lavenham, Sudbury, Suffolk**
**GO?** The Lavenham Guildhall is a National Trust property steeped in almost five centuries of history, with both a religious and an industrial past (it famously produced dyed cloth), and can be visited all year round, though it isn't open every day. Kubrick's masterpiece *Barry Lyndon* and, um, TV's *Lovejoy* were also filmed in and around the Guildhall.

*Want us to investigate if a movie scenario is bollocks or snapped yourself at a film location? Contact us at totalfilm@futurenet.com*

A24/LIONSGATE, MOMENTUM, WARNER BROS.



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# EDITORS IN MOVIES

The final edit...

1

## THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA

Miranda Priestly (Meryl Streep) floats through her *Runway* offices dispersing office girls out of the lifts, wounding new hires with her disappointment, creating almost impossible tasks (unpublished Harry Potter), and calling out, 'Gird your loins!' A monster. That's all.

2

## SUPERMAN (1978)

Jackie Cooper's cigar-chomping, grumpy ed of Metropolis' *Daily Planet*, Perry White, maintains that a good reporter doesn't get great stories, they 'make them great'. He certainly has his pick of corking lead stories, what with nearly 50 years of cinematic Supes.

3

## THE POST

*Washington Post* honcho Ben Bradlee (Tom Hanks) has his journalistic resolve tested by leaked docs of national interest in 1971. A real-life figure in a real-life case, Bradlee rolls up his shirt sleeves (literally and figuratively) and newsprint press porn ensues.

4

## SPIDER-MAN (2002)

J. Jonah Jameson is an EIC with a magnificent 'tache and a short fuse, especially when it comes to the Spidey shenanigans that make the front page of *The Daily Bugle*. J.K. Simmons' JJJ skipped universes to the MCU to continue shouting at Tom Holland's Peter Parker.

5

## THE FRENCH DISPATCH

When he dies, Arthur Howitzer Jr.'s French-based periodical obeys his last edict by printing a final issue. Based on *New Yorker* founder Harold Ross, Howitzer (Bill Murray) does not allow crying in the office and orders booze for meetings from the cafe downstairs.

6

## THE PAPER

Chain-smoking grouchy exec ed Bernie White (Robert Duvall) has no time for warring editors (Michael Keaton and Glenn Close) on his buzzy NY tabloid. Even less so when his city ed and managing ed have fisticuffs among the presses. Live for the ink.

7

## ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN

Alan J. Pakula's thriller tracks Woodward and Bernstein's real-life *Washington Post* Watergate exposé. Their leader is Ben Bradlee (see *The Post*) played by Jason Robards – a feet-up, red-pencil-editing pro who demands 'harder information' and 'Where's the goddamn story?'

8

## 13 GOING ON 30

When teen Jenna magically wakes in her 30-year-old body, she has drama to deal with as a magazine writer. Her Brit boss, Richard (Andy Serkis), has an of-the-era goatee and shiny suits but shows untapped moonwalking skills when she busts out her *Thriller* dance at a party.

9

## HOW TO LOSE A GUY IN 10 DAYS

*Composure* magazine's doyenne is Lana Jong (Bebe Neuwirth), a woman dripping in pearls with a sharp bob and sharper tongue who wants copy on her desk in 48 hours and no ambition from her writers. She loses a journalist in 10 days…

10

## DEADLINE – U.S.A.

Humphrey Bogart's hard-bitten editor, Ed (yep, name and job align), has a fight on his hands to save his NY rag, *The Day*. His tirades about the importance of print are sadly as pertinent now as they were in 1952. He'd have hated social. #BuyMagazines. **JANE CROWTHER**

ALAMY, GETTY

*Did we miss something? Let us know on @totalfilm*

REEL ESTATE

**FOR SALE** A luxuriously appointed, 19th-century country mansion in the Palisades on the outskirts of Gotham offers all the conveniences the modern billionaire could hope for. With towers on each corner, this Jacobean-style manor boasts an impressive welcome hall and a show-stopping glass roof, and the master bedroom has been left untouched by the current occupant. Be aware that beneath the property, there are vast limestone caverns, prone to rodent infestation (watch out for guano), but there's ample off-road parking via a private road.

## HINDSIGHT CORNER

### DAKOTA JOHNSON

MADAME WEB (2024)

**FEBRUARY 2024**

**'If they want me to come back [for a sequel] then I definitely will.'**

**MARCH 2024**

**'Art does not do well when it's made by committee… It was definitely an experience for me to make that movie. I had never done anything like it before. I probably will never do anything like it again because I don't make sense in that world.'**

# FLOP CULTURE

## MYSTERY MEN

Released 25 years ago, was this team-up of Earth's sloppiest heroes ahead of its time? Or too ill-defined to fulfil the promise in its gathering of gormless do-gooders?

**Why it was a good idea (on paper)**

A-holes assemble! In retrospect, there's no mystery as to why 1999's riff on Bob Burden's *Flaming Carrot Comics* would be greenlit. As sundry Guardians and Deadpools have since proved, odd/goofball superheroes have serious comic mileage.

**What went wrong?**

In the event, *Mystery Men* suffered from *too much* comic mileage. Directing from Neil (*Hocus Pocus*) Cuthbert's script, commercials man Kinka Usher was blessed with a crack comic cast, including Ben Stiller, Janeane Garofalo, William H. Macy, Hank Azaria, Kel Mitchell and Paul Reubens. But the job of wrangling them was perhaps a curse for an inexperienced helmer. Spot-on casting as sour supe Mr Furious, Stiller said the script was constantly reworked as the leads improvised.

Over-budgeted at $68m, the film's shoot time sprawled, with Garofalo lamenting the 'very long hours' in which 'very little' got done. Azaria bemoaned the on-set struggles to balance character comedy with the demands of a glossy effects piece, while Garofalo added, 'I have no idea what they were trying to do with the film, but they sure didn't accomplish it.' Critics couldn't see the point either, arguing that since many superhero titles were self-satirical anyway, wasn't the satire redundant? Ahead of its peak-superhero moment but not savvy enough to channel its source material's strengths, the result put the box-office 'miss' in *Mystery*.

**Redeeming feature**

Between Macy's dignified Shoveler ('I shovel *very* well') and Tom Waits' gravelly Doc Heller, *Mystery Men* throws enough daft ideas at the wall for some to stick.

**What happened next?**

Cuthbert got one more film made (erm, *Pluto Nash*), though Usher never directed another. Meanwhile, later superhero films showed how genre self-awareness and sincerity could mix.

**Should it be remade?**

With *Boogie Nights* in mind, Burden later wondered how the film might have played under Paul Thomas Anderson's watch. *Mystery Men* hardly merits a redo in post-*The Boys*/MCU times, but we'd pay to see that unlikely vision fulfilled. **KEVIN HARLEY**

| BUDGET | BOX OFFICE | AWARDS | TF STAR RATING | ROTTEN TOMATOES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| $68m | $33.5m | 0 | ★★★ ★★ | 60% |

ALAMY, GETTY



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Big music gigs: should we see them on the cinema screen?

# IS IT JUST ME OR ARE CONCERT MOVIES BETTER THAN THE REAL THING?

NEIL SMITH

Last year I spent a small fortune buying tickets to one of Madonna's greatest-hits gigs at the O2 in London. Her Madgesty was on top form that night (and on time…) and my wife and I had a pretty good view from our seats in the lower tier.

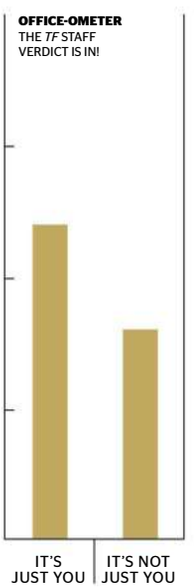
Well, we did until Mads arrived on stage. At that moment, the couple directly in front of us shot to their feet and proceeded to remain that way for the next two hours. Oblivious to anyone around them, they writhed, gyrated and *Vogue*-d like they were auditioning to be backing dancers. Instead of watching a 65-year-old pop star turn back time, we spent the evening looking, both literally and figuratively, at a pair of annoying arses.

I had another concert experience in 2023 that was the total opposite of our compromised night in North Greenwich. A great seat I got to sit in for the entirety of the set. A perfect view of the stage that stayed blissfully unobstructed. Flawless sound, epic tunes and not a single camera phone held aloft anywhere in my vicinity. And all for a fraction of what I had spent on Madonna's Celebration shindig.

The concert was *Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour*, thrillingly and thoughtfully captured on film in all its three-hour, multi-costumed glory. What a treat it was to savour it in the comfort of my local cinema, safe in the knowledge there would not be one duff note, dodgy key change or screaming Swiftie to temper my enjoyment.

I had just as much fun watching *Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé*, another fine record of a game-changing performance with revealing backstage footage thrown in for good measure. Not for a moment did I feel I was missing out; if anything, I felt I was getting more bang for my buck than I would ever have got in a stadium. If Tay Tay and Queen B's cine-triumphs are anything to go by, the new breed of concert film is no longer a lesser alternative: it's visually, sonically and sensorily superior. Or is it just me?

***Share your reaction at www.gamesradar.com/totalfilm or on Facebook and Twitter.***



TRAFALGAR RELEASING

## LAST TIME WAS SILENT COMEDY THE BEST?

**LIAM HICKEY** Nope, not even slightly! They churned out just as much seat-filling junk back then as they do now.

**GRAHAM JAMES NEWMAN** Laurel and Hardy truly started to be the best comedy duo as soon as talkies started. Before that they were just funny.

**ALEX BRYSON** I think with so much [silent cinema] being lost, it's honestly too difficult to actually tell.

**GARY KELLETT** Maybe I'm alone in this, but if I had the choice of watching a silent comedy or *Superbad*, I'd choose *Superbad* all day every day!

**MARK EGAN** It's just you. I hope.

TOTAL FILM RETROSPECTIVE

# THE FLINTSTONES

With a spot-on cast, a smart script and eye-watering attention to detail, 1994's *The Flintstones* might be the most painstakingly assembled live-action animation adap ever made. As the cave-family comedy turns 30, director Brian Levant tells *Buff* how he yabba dabba did it.

WORDS **SIMON BLAND**

I was terrified, but at the same time, tremendously confident,' says Hanna-Barbera megafan Brian Levant on getting the dream opportunity to direct 1994's live-action *The Flintstones*. Released a year after Steven Spielrock's – erm, we mean Spielberg's – *Jurassic Park*, this long-in-development adaptation of animation's modern Stone Age family caught audiences at the height of their dino obsessions. At the helm was *Beethoven* filmmaker Levant, a die-hard *Flintstones* obsessive who knew exactly how to bring Bedrock to life. 'I wasn't trying to reinvent the Stone Age,' he tells *Buff*. 'I wanted to be true to that original vision.'

True he was. In retrospect, Levant's film is a marvel of practical effects, smart sitcom-y gags and a clear love of the source material, but getting to that point wasn't easy. Hollywood had been trying to bring *The Flintstones* to cinemas for years, first with *Die Hard* producer Joel Silver and ending with Spielberg's production company Amblin. However, finding the right creative partnership was tricky, with Ron Howard and Ivan Reitman snubbing offers to direct and multiple writers taking failed cracks at a story.

The project finally found a new lease of life when producer Spielberg spotted his ideal Fred Flintstone in his *Always* star John Goodman, and, under the guidance of former *Happy Days* writer Levant, a group of sitcom scribes were invited to retool Amblin's existing screenplays. The end result was a workplace mix-up that saw Fred and wife Wilma (Elizabeth Perkins) have their friendship with neighbours Barney (Rick Moranis) and Betty Rubble (Rosie O'Donnell) put to the test when a promotion gets them embroiled in a shady plot from quarry boss Cliff Vandercave (Kyle MacLachlan) and his sexy secretary, Miss Sharon Stone (Halle Berry).

'We were kind of hamstrung because we had to use a lot of the storyline of the failed script,' says Levant of the narrative retooling

ALAMY



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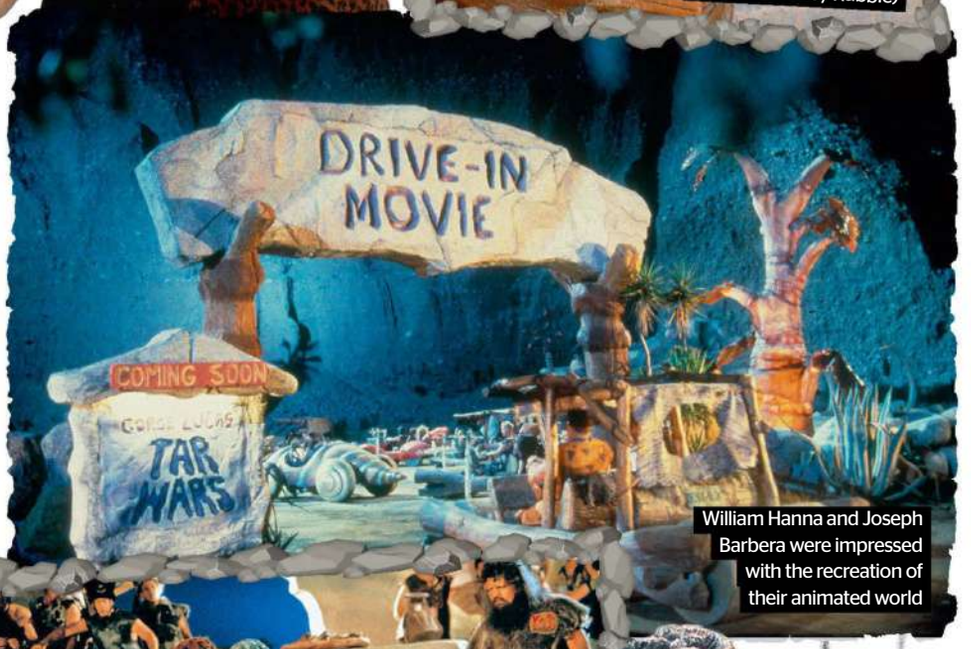
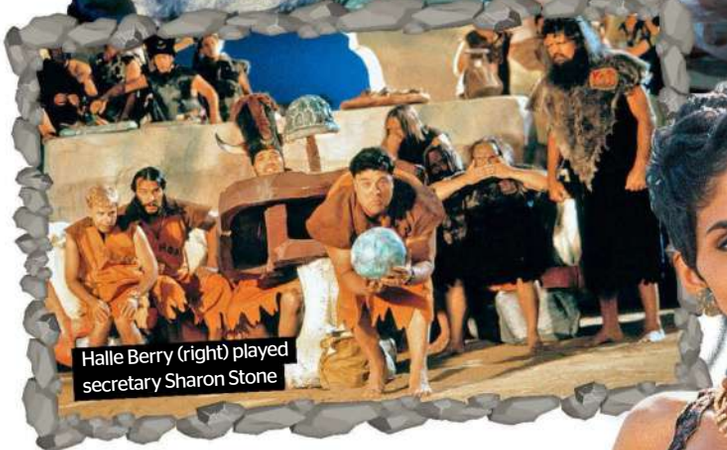
Director Brian Levant on set with John Goodman (Fred Flintstone) and Rick Moranis (Barney Rubble)




William Hanna and Joseph Barbera were impressed with the recreation of their animated world



Halle Berry (right) played secretary Sharon Stone

challenges that ultimately earned his movie its biggest criticisms. 'If I was starting from scratch, I wouldn't have done a story about what is, in essence, corporate malfeasance,' he laughs, 'but we could hang the characters on that story and it would've taken us longer if we'd started from scratch.'

While his TV writer team gave *The Flintstones* strong comedy chops, it was the production design where things really excelled. Shot in just 55 days, Levant's crew, led by production designer William Sandell, built a sprawling, real-life Bedrock at California's Vasquez Rocks Natural Area Park that featured actual foam-stone houses, workable rock-based props, a fleet of drivable foot-powered cars and even its own fast-food joint, Rock Donalds.

'To take virtually everything you've ever learned about everything and translate that into Flintstones terms was a tremendous creative undertaking and what I'm most proud of,' smiles Levant. 'I put my stamp on every one of those 6,000 props and wardrobe [items]. We got really good at figuring out how to translate things into bone, stone and skin.'

The production's hard work was put to the ultimate test when *The Flintstones* creators William Hanna and Joseph Barbera visited Levant's set. As he picked them up in Barney's Loggin Continental pencil-tip car, Levant was fully expecting them to be disappointed with what they found. 'They were very dour,' he recalls, 'but when they saw the scale of the project and their vision brought to life in 3D and constructed out of foam and paint, they soon started to have these old-married-couple looks and their delight grew. Finally, Joe turned to me and said, "Never in my life did I expect to see anything like that,"' smiles Levant. 'I told him we were just getting started – and we were.'

Despite critics attacking its story, audience familiarity helped make *The Flintstones* a huge financial success with a global box-office haul of over $340 million. As a result, Amblin quickly wanted more. 'They wanted to do the same thing with *The Flintstones* that they did with *Back to the Future* and shoot [two sequels] back-to-back,' reveals the director. However, Goodman, who already had conflicted feelings about being forever linked to such an iconic character, had other ideas. 'He made an appointment with Spielberg and said, "*Please* don't make me do any more of these,"' says the director.

While Levant returned for 2000 prequel *The Flintstones in Viva Rock Vegas* with a brand-new cast, recapturing the magic of the original was hard. 'The box-office [numbers] almost became a negative for me,' he says candidly. 'It was kind of overwhelming personally and kind of hurt me because I thought, "How do you ever top this?" And I didn't.'

Still, audience fondness for his original has endured: 'It still has a place in people's hearts and tickles their imagination,' smiles Levant. 'Hanna and Barbera created this amazing world where man and beast lived in harmony and your biggest problem was trying to knock down all the bowling pins – and we knocked down *all* the bowling pins in this movie.'

**THE FLINTSTONES IS AVAILABLE ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DIGITAL HD, AND IS CURRENTLY STREAMING ON SKY AND NOW.**

# GOLDEN GRAHAMS

## THIS MONTH
## The Big Fix

**So much about American cinema changed in the late 60s and 70s, and the private investigator subgenre was not immune to getting New Hollywood's muss 'n' murk treatment. Movies like *Shaft*, *Klute*, *The Long Goodbye* and *Night Moves* tuned their frequency to the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, women's liberation, the decline of the counterculture movement and the Watergate scandal. It was like viewing classic PIs Philip Marlowe and Mike Hammer through a kaleidoscope, or perhaps a fug of marijuana smoke.**

One of the best PI movies of the era is less remembered than the titles above. *The Big Fix* (1978), directed by Jeremy Kagan, stars Richard Dreyfuss as Moses Wine, a Jewish gumshoe who's eking out a living in Los Angeles. In the 60s, Moses was a student activist at Berkeley; now he's disillusioned, divorced (his ex is played by Bonnie Bedelia, who played Mrs. John McClane a decade later) and working two-bit cases while his two restless kids ride shotgun in his VW Beetle. Soon after we meet Moses, an ex-flame, Lila (Susan Anspach), appears with the offer of a case: she's working for a political candidate whose campaign is being smeared by propagandist leaflets connecting him to Howard Eppis (F. Murray Abraham), a 60s radical who's gone underground. Can Moses find out who's printing the phony fliers, and track down Eppis?

Kagan came to the project, based on the same-titled novel by Roger L. Simon, after directing *Katherine* (1975) and *Heroes* (1977), meaning *The Big Fix* can be viewed as the third in a trilogy of movies concerned with the malaise that followed the socio-political commitment of the 60s and early 70s. Dreyfuss, who also produces, had read the novel and chimed with it. 'The 60s were the last gasp of principle and passion that we've had in this sorry excuse of a century,' he wrote in 2000, in an essay reprinted in the booklet that accompanies Indicator's excellent Blu-ray release. 'They were our Spanish Civil War, our test, our moment where our reach for something fine exceeded our grasp. But reach we did…'

Few films so capture the sorrowful loss of the counterculture dream, and it's impossible not to be moved as Moses one night sits alone and weeping as he watches footage of 60s anti-war protests.

But *The Big Fix* is also terrific fun, beguiling viewers with its suitably fuzzy plot, honkytonk jazz score (by Bill Conti, who two years earlier wrote the *Rocky* theme) and arresting LA locations, from Beverly Hills to Koreatown. Most beguiling of all is Dreyfuss. Already a star after *Jaws* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, he won the Best Actor Oscar for *The Goodbye Girl* in between *The Big Fix*'s shoot and release, and is here on sensationally charismatic form. Never mind that he broke his arm two weeks before the shoot – the cast is weaved into the story, with Moses offering different explanations for his injury to each character who asks.

That *The Big Fix* didn't do well enough financially for the studio to adapt any more of Simon's eight Moses Wine novels is a huge shame. 'I will always regret that we couldn't make one or two or 10 sequels,' said Dreyfuss. Oh well, we at least have this one. Make the most of it and watch immediately.

**ONE MORE…**

**HICKEY & BOGGS 1972**
Another largely forgotten 70s PI noir set in LA, this one scripted by Walter Hill.

Editor-at-Large Jamie Graham unearths underrated classics…

### See this if you liked…

**THE BIG SLEEP** 1946
Bogart's take on Raymond Chandler's famed PI Philip Marlowe offers the template to riff on.

**COMING HOME** 1978
Hal Ashby's returning-vet drama, released, like *The Big Fix*, in 1978, the year US cinema started wrestling with Vietnam.

**THE BIG LEBOWSKI** 1998
More mishaps, marijuana and mystery in Los Angeles. Plus John Goodman's Vietnam vet.

**INHERENT VICE** 2014
LA noir, recreational drugs, the lost counterculture dream… A perfect double bill with *The Big Fix*.

**JAMIE WILL RETURN NEXT ISSUE…**
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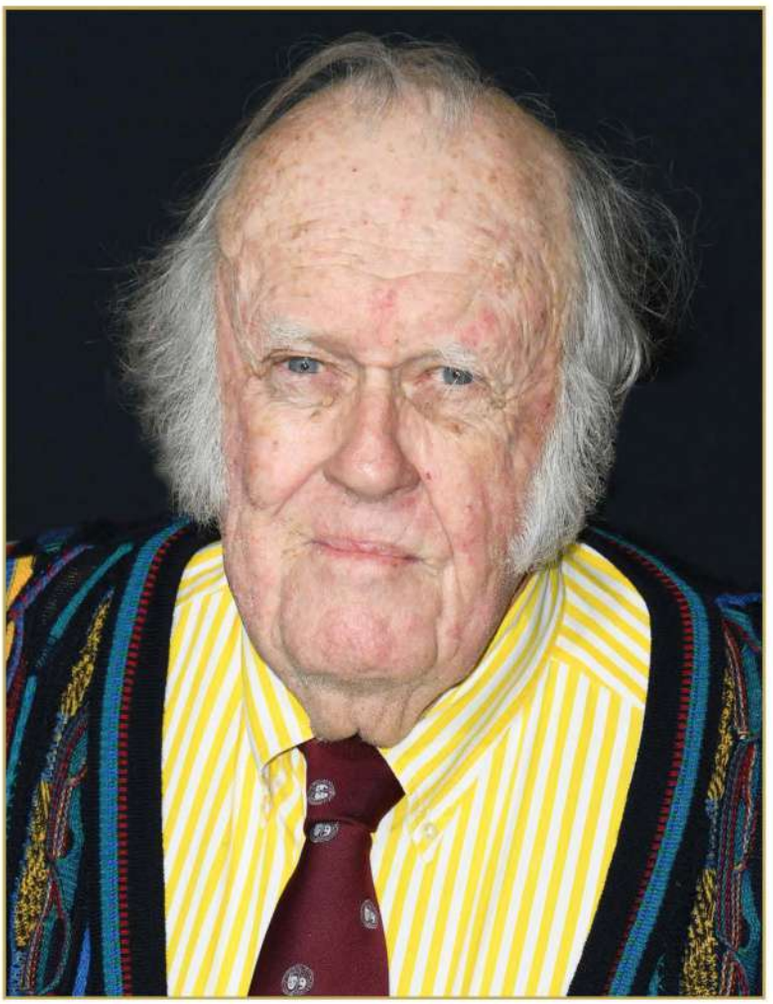

# M. EMMET WALSH

**_Blood Simple_ by the Coen brothers is near-universally viewed as one of the greatest directorial debuts. And there is perhaps no better introduction to a filmmaker's – or in this case, filmmakers' – sensibilities than the monologue that opens the movie, in which a narrator lays out the most direct explanation of the Coens' approach to their fictional universes: 'The world is full of complainers. And the fact is, nothing comes with a guarantee. Now I don't care if you're the Pope of Rome, President of the United States or Man of the Year; something can always go wrong…'**

This narration is delivered by one of the best voices ever to grace American cinema, that of beloved character actor M. Emmet Walsh. The late performer – known for his hangdog features and dry voice – had well over 200 credits in film and television across nearly 60 years, though *Blood Simple* was a rare starring role, winning him the inaugural Independent Spirit Award for Best Male Lead. For many, that private-detective character will be his defining performance: an alchemical combination of his ability to be scary, sleazy, darkly funny, and even a little sweet, sometimes simultaneously.

Two years prior to *Blood Simple*, *Blade Runner* saw those skills used to similarly searing effect in a very different neo-noir. Ridley Scott's sci-fi classic wows you in its opening moments, and only gets better once Walsh enters as LAPD captain Bryant: pulling Harrison Ford's Deckard out of retirement and intimidating him with a mix of deceptive friendliness and stern menace.

From his first significant bit part in *Alice's Restaurant* through to late-career roles in *Knives Out* and *The Righteous Gemstones*, Walsh had a natural ability to make one hang on to every word he delivered in his distinctive drawl – even if it was sometimes just for a minute of screentime. At home in any genre, his career encompassed everything from iconic comedies (*The Jerk*, *Raising Arizona*, *Fletch*) and era-defining dramas (*Serpico*, *Reds*, *Ordinary People*) to cult franchises (*Critters*, *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*); counter-culture classics (*Midnight Cowboy*) to straight-to-DVD schlock (*The Scorpion King 4*). He worked with New Hollywood titans – Peter Bogdanovich, Brian De Palma, Elaine May – and brought gravitas to early works by modern greats (Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, Brad Bird's *The Iron Giant*).

Film critic Roger Ebert famously had a Stanton-Walsh rule, where he suggested that no film featuring either Walsh or Harry Dean Stanton in a supporting role can be all bad. While Walsh's presence alone won't redeem efforts like *Wild Wild West* or *Free Willy 2* as misunderstood masterpieces, revisiting them guarantees at least one scene where you'll be absolutely rapt. **JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**

GETTY

ALAMY



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THE BIG SHOT

# BLACK NARCISSUS' BELL-RINGING NUN

The atmosphere in this film is everything,' wrote Michael Powell of *Black Narcissus*. 'Wind, the altitude, the beauty of the setting – it must be all under our control.' It was never on the cards, then, for the director and his producing partner Emeric Pressburger to film their adaptation of Rumer Godden's 1939 novel in India, the land where it had been set. No: this tale of English nuns struggling to set up a convent in the Himalayas would be shot almost wholly at Pinewood, on sets designed by Alfred Junge and with vast painted cycloramas providing the requisite mountain scenery.

Take this establishing shot of Sister Ruth (Kathleen Byron) ringing the noon bell at the palace of Mopu, a former royal residence that Sister Superior Clodagh (Deborah Kerr) has been tasked with transforming into a hospital and school. On the face of it, the bell sits precariously on the edge of a cliff, looking over a lush green valley hundreds of feet below. In reality, though, Byron was barely 10 feet above the ground, with Jack Cardiff's Technicolor camera elevated another few feet higher.

Between Byron and the camera was positioned a pane of glass on which prolific matte artist Walter Percy Day – aided by his sons Arthur and Thomas and his stepson Peter Ellenshaw – had painted a gloriously verdant simulacrum of the Himalayan landscape, complete with rocky trail extending off into the distance. It's a stunning trompe-l'oeil, one of many that Day created for Powell and Pressburger over an eight-year collaboration that spanned six of The Archers' films. For this and many other achievements – *Henry V*, *In Which We Serve* and *Things to Come* among them – he was awarded an OBE in 1948.

Byron herself appeared in three other Powell and Pressburger productions (*The Silver Fleet*, *A Matter of Life and Death* and *The Small Back Room*) plus many more films besides. Yet it was the troubled Sister Ruth for which she would be remembered – an irony given how much she clashed with her director and sometime paramour during the making of the film. 'Michael wanted me to overstate Sister Ruth's madness, and I used to argue with him that the character didn't know she was mad,' the actor would admit later. 'Deborah Kerr used to whisper to me, "Don't argue with him. Just say, 'Oh, what a marvellous idea!' and then do exactly what you want to do…"' **NEIL SMITH**

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DEFINING FILMS

# MY MOVIE LIFE

The movies that terrify, tickle and trigger tears for **Adam Buxton**.

## THE FIRST MOVIE I EVER SAW

One of my earliest cinema memories is **The Rescuers**. It's about mice from all over the world forming a UN-like organisation called the Rescue Aid Society that helps people who have been abducted. One member is a hot mouse called Miss Bianca who has white fur and is voiced by Eva Gabor. The only bad thing was the songs. We always had the *Disney's Greatest Hits* cassette on in the car and [my sister and I] would sing along to all the bangers. The *Rescuers* songs were pretty shit. Although, the *Rescue Aid Society* theme was quite good.

## THE LAST FILM I SAW IN A CINEMA

**The Creator**. I was excited because I love sci-fi and robots, and Gareth Edwards is brilliant at all that robot stuff. Some of the machines in it got me as excited as I was seeing X-wings and TIE fighters for the first time when I saw *Star Wars* in 1978. It had amazing visuals and, conceptually, I liked that I was seeing a film about AI with a slightly different take on it from pretty much everything everyone was saying after ChatGPT came out, which was, 'Oh, we're fucked.' It was nice seeing *The Creator* and thinking, 'Maybe there's more to it than that.'

## THE FILM THAT SCARES ME MOST

Jonathan Glazer's **Under the Skin**. Scarlett Johansson plays this beautiful alien woman who roams Scotland picking up men, harvesting their essence and sending it back home. Two big scenes are beyond horrific: Scarlett watching impassively as a couple try to rescue their dog and end up drowning in the sea while their baby cries on the sand, and the bit where she takes the bloke to her special marinating pool and he sees another bloke floating around who pops. It's the most nightmarish thing I've ever seen.

## THE FILM THAT ALWAYS MAKES ME LAUGH

**Galaxy Quest**. It's perfect for me because I love that whole genre. Tim Allen's great, Sam Rockwell's brilliant, Alan Rickman's amazing, and as someone who's obsessed with *Alien*, it was so good having Sigourney Weaver in there with a good enough sense of humour to take the piss out of it all. I feel like *Galaxy Quest* was released right on the cusp of films becoming a bit too self-aware. It makes points about not very diverse casting and what women's roles were in those sorts of films, but they were made very nicely and done with a lot of heart.

## THE FILM THAT ALWAYS MAKES ME CRY

I'm a big cryer. **Enough Said** by Nicole Holofcener really made me cry. It was James Gandolfini's last film. He plays against type as a nice divorcee dad. Julia Louis-Dreyfus plays a masseuse who becomes friendly with this woman. She bumps into her ex-husband, played by Gandolfini, and doesn't realise this guy is the ex-husband of the woman she's become friendly with. When he finds out, he gets upset because he feels he's been lied to and says he doesn't want to be friends any more. It's like being punched in the gut.

## THE LAST FILM I WATCHED ON A PLANE

**Hypnotic** by Robert Rodriguez. Oh my God, it was like an episode of some *Law & Order* spin-off mashed up with bits of other movies and ideas from *Inception*. I remember watching *Beverly Hills Cop* on a plane, but the aeroplane cut had massacred all of the dialogue. Instead of 'motherfucker', they used 'melon farmer'. It was ludicrous. **SIMON BLAND**

**ADAM BUXTON'S PODCAST TOUR VISITS CITIES IN THE UK THROUGHOUT MAY AND JUNE. VISIT ADAM-BUXTON.CO.UK/EVENTS**

ALAMY, GETTY

THE *TF* BRAIN

# WHICH OBSCURE PREQUEL CHARACTER ARE YOU?

ARE YOU LESSER BY NAME AS WELL AS NATURE? A FAMOUS FACE OR NO GOOD IN A RACE? FIND OUT BELOW!

**START**

ARE YOU AN OSCAR-NOMINATED DIRECTOR-SLASH-EASTER EGG?

YES → HOODED SOFIA COPPOLA OR BLUE GEORGE LUCAS?

- SOFIA

YOU ARE SACHÉ

- GEORGE

YOU ARE BARON PAPANOIDA

NO → CAN WE 'SEE' A CERTAIN PROTOCOL DROID IN YOU?

YES → ARE YOU 3PO IN SILVER, IN A WAITER'S OUTFIT OR UNSHEATHED, AS IT WERE?

- SILVER

YOU ARE TC-14

- YOUR TABLE'S READY!!!

YOU ARE FLO

- OH MY GOODNESS!

YOU ARE DANNL FAYTONNI

NO → DO YOU HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE BUT LITTLE TO DO?

NO → PODRACING: DID YOU LOSE BY ENGINE FAILURE, DEATH, OR BY BEING THE WORST BEN IN STAR WARS?

- SPLUTTER!

YOU ARE ODY MANDRELL

- KABOOM!

YOU ARE RATTS TYERELL

- WAH-WAH-WAH...

YOU ARE BEN QUADINAROS

YES → YOUR NAME: LIKE A TYPO OF 'TYPO', OR PROFOUNDLY UNSEXY?

- TYPO

YOU ARE CAPTAIN TYPHO

- UNSEXY

YOU ARE POGGLE THE LESSER

DISNEY



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# NAME THE FRAME

Guess the films these eight cloaked figures appear in. Bonus points for their names...

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

**ANSWERS**: 1. *300* (LEONIDAS) 2. *ALADDIN* (JAFAR) 3. *MORTAL KOMBAT* (LORD RAIDEN) 4. *EYES WIDE SHUT* (DR WILLIAM HARFORD) 5. *THE FIFTH ELEMENT* (CORNELIUS) 6. *THE OTHER BOLEYN GIRL* (HENRY TUDOR) 7. *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE*. *THE VAMPIRE CHRONICLES* (LOUIS AND ARMAND) 8. *WHAT WE DO IN THE SHADOWS* (VLADISLAV)

# Dialogue

## Mail, rants, theories etc.

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## ★ STAR LETTER

**As a man of a certain age, I can't help noticing that the iconic superhero pose – down on one knee, hand on the raised knee – is exactly the same pose I use to lever myself back up off the floor, with an involuntary groan, when I've been playing with the dogs. With Hulk, Hawkeye and Iron Man all in their 50s, and even Thor and Black Widow entering their 40s, this makes a lot of sense to me.**

***SIMON BEASOR, THE WIRRAL***

**The *TF* staffers who are also of a certain age feel your pain, Simon. Our other 'superheroic' traits include joints that creak like Groot in high wind and a need to sleep longer than a deep-frozen Captain America. Simon and everyone with a letter printed here will receive a copy of supernatural horror *Baghead*, out now on DVD, BD and digital via Studiocanal. Didn't send an address? Email it! Or nothing hood will come of this!**

Black Widow kindly demonstrates how the key to superheroing is the middle-aged crouch

@

**CraigHampton 321**

**[on the *Matrix 5* news] 'I liked... whatever the last one was called but please, just stop.'**

### UNLUCKY NUMBER

I have an old-school portable DVD player that I watch while pedalling away on my exercise bike in my garage. Recently I went through an old box set of the original *The Omen* trilogy. While viewing the first (and best!) movie, just as David Warner lost his head in graphic style, I happened to glance down at the bike's odometer, which read... 6.66km. I properly pants-ed myself. Am I the new Damien Thorn, with plans for world domination? Help!

***PHIL SLOAN, BEXLEY***

**TBH, we're more concerned that you've been pedalling for more than five hours, if you've been working your way through an entire trilogy... Hope you're not starting on a Bond box set next. PSA, readers: exercise is great, but do remember to take regular fitness breaks, eating snacks in front of a big noisy screen for an afternoon or two.**

### INTO THE SPIDER-WORSE

I've got a storyline for the next entry in Sony's Spider-Man universe. Featuring yet another tangential superhero, this classic is sure to continue the success of *Madame Web*. Act I will see our protagonist face the challenge of climbing the world's largest building, The Water Spout. In Act II, freak heavy rainfall will bring about a rapid descent for our hero. Act III: a subsequent heatwave will create drought conditions (global-warming subplot), which then allow our hero to go up The Spout again. The name of our superhero: Incy Wincy Spider-Woman!

***DAVID, LEEDS***

**We didn't need Madame Web's clairvoyance to see where you were going, David, but were hooked all the same. Just one thing: can this Water Spout be a giant falling/exploding object in the sky instead? Feels more Marvel. One other thing: where the hell is the cameo from Black Sheep (a resurrected Natasha Romanoff's new codename), teasing her teammates Master, Dame and Lane Boy?? We need to keep the wheels on this bus going round and round!**

### STARTING ORDERS

Rewatched *Scream 2*. The opening frustrates me. It demonstrates everything I hate about disorganised people. They rock up just as the movie starts. Then within minutes they're back out, one buying popcorn, the other having a pee. Get organised,

**WHAT YOU MISSED ON THE POD LAST MONTH**

Exclusive interviews with Dev Patel, Jordan Peele, Jack Black, Jake Gyllenhaal and more. Our 2025 Oscar predictions. The *TF* interviews we'd like to see turned into movies. Plus reviews and more!

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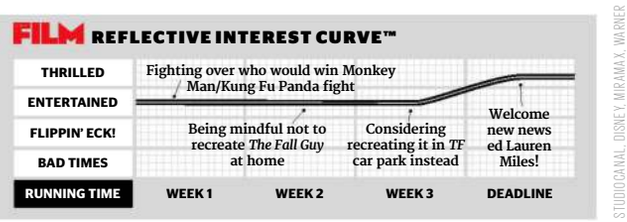


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# OFFICE SPACED

## CHATTER 'GEMS' OVERHEARD IN THE *TOTAL FILM* OFFICE THIS MONTH...

* 'In the 80s, every song was either called *The Power of Love*, from a movie, or both' * **'If I was a giant worm I wouldn't let some random ride around on me'** *

people!! Don't miss the start of the movie and don't disrupt others. And don't get me started on the rather fortunate cubicle-guessing by Ghostface. That was some prediction!
***RON TYME, HAMPSHIRE***

**One does sometimes feel that movies could set a better example by depicting more considerate behaviour by cinemagoers. Granted, the *Snow White* scene in *Gremlins* probably wouldn't be the same if the little monsters just sat there in monkish silence without popcorn bags on their ears. (On the other hand, wouldn't want our local picture house to start dealing with chatterboxes by burning the building to the ground.)**

## PRAISING HOPE

In an issue typically filled with great content [issue 345], I almost missed the kudos in *Golden Grahams* for John Sayles and, in particular, his lost gem, *City of Hope*. It's one of my favourite films, with a stellar cast of lesser (-used and -appreciated) lights, and I never fail to watch it if I see it on any given platform. Those final moments of the always-superb David Strathairn's character vainly screaming for 'HE-HELP!' always hit me deep, where it counts.
***KEN MEYER JR, VIA EMAIL***

**Christopher Saunders**
**[Why is *Joker: Folie à Deux* rated R?] '[For] Its deep and trenchant commentary on the plight of clowns in modern society'**

**Glad you liked, Ken. Yes, on the vast spectrum of '*City*' movies, Sayles' sits nearer the end with ... *Lights* and ...*of God* (rather than several kilometres further down with *Police Academy 6: City Under Siege*). And please don't miss Jamie's column – he's sitting on more lost gems than Smaug the dragon.**

## SUITE TALK

Reading the review of *Lisa Frankenstein* in issue 348, I see that you describe the corpse in the film as '*Riverdale*'s Cole Sprouse'. Ermm, no, that should be '*The Suite Life of Zack & Cody*'s Cole Sprouse'! Just don't ask me if he was Zack or Cody...
***JED WAGMAN, STANMORE***

**How about we compromise and henceforth refer to him as '*Dialogue* letter catalyst' Cole Sprouse? Surely anyone would want to put that at the top of their CV.**

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SPOILER ALERT!

# 60 SECOND SCREENPLAY

*TF* SAVES YOU THE COST OF A MOVIE EVERY MONTH. THIS ISSUE: **MADAME WEB**

**WORDS MATT LOOKER**

**FADE IN:**

**EXT: PERUVIAN JUNGLE**
In 1973, DAKOTA JOHNSON's pregnant mum is in the Amazon researching spiders, right before she dies at the hand of TAHAR RAHIM. A handy spider tribe saves the baby.

**EXT: NEW YORK**
In 2003, paramedic DAKOTA JOHNSON is in an ambulance researching an emergency, right before she nearly dies. Her colleague ADAM SCOTT revives her.

**ADAM SCOTT**
You're OK! Phew! Don't worry, you're alive and well and starring in one of Sony's Spider-Man spin-offs.

**DAKOTA JOHNSON**
Oh no, I think I can see the future now and things don't look too good…

**INT: OPERA HOUSE**
TAHAR RAHIM uses his wealth and charm to seduce a woman. Then he ruins the mood by telling her about his dream.

**TAHAR RAHIM**
I have a vision that I will be killed by three women in spider costumes, so I need to find and kill them now – in my own spider costume, for some reason.

DAKOTA JOHNSON has a vision about a balloon bursting. It does. Then she has a vision about her boss dying in a traffic accident. He does. Then she has a vision about a pigeon flying into her window. She opens the window.

**DAKOTA JOHNSON**
I saved the pigeon! That means the future can be changed! Kinda wish I had tested this after the balloon.

**EXT: GRAND CENTRAL STATION**
DAKOTA JOHNSON gets the same train as SYDNEY SWEENEY, ISABELA MERCED and CELESTE O'CONNOR. She has a long, repetitive vision about TAHAR RAHIM killing them. They run away.

**SYDNEY SWEENEY**
You saved us from that Spider-M…PERSON. Spider-Person. I think we're all connected and this was fate, which is a loose concept in this film. Plus, we all have abandonment issues.

DAKOTA JOHNSON immediately abandons them. The girls go to a diner and get recognised from the newspaper, even though the attack only happened a few hours ago. TAHAR RAHIM arrives and kills them.

**DAKOTA JOHNSON**
Twist! That was one of my visions! Now I need to save them in time. It would have been useful to get that vision much earlier, really.

**INT: MOTEL**
DAKOTA JOHNSON teaches the girls CPR just in case it comes in handy later on. They talk openly about their abandonment issues.

**DAKOTA JOHNSON**
Right. Uh-huh. Hey, I need to leave you and go to Peru on a whim. You'll stay with my friend Adam Scott and put his pregnant sister in mortal danger.

She travels to the Amazon and immediately finds the area that took her mum years to discover. The chief of the spider-people tribe greets her and makes her perform astral projection.

**SPIDER-CHIEF**
A spider somehow gave you the ability to see every possible future. When you take on the responsibility, great power will come… which is basically the opposite of Spider-Man's thing.

**EXT: WAREHOUSE**
TAHAR RAHIM attacks the girls. DAKOTA JOHNSON returns from her 20-minute trip to Peru to save them. They run into an abandoned warehouse full of explosives that are really just cheap fireworks.

**DAKOTA JOHNSON**
Now I can see all possible futures – somehow that means I can project myself to help all three girls at once. Nothing can stop me now.

TAHAR RAHIM punches her and she stops. Eventually a big Pepsi product placement falls and crushes him. DAKOTA JOHNSON falls into the river again.

**ISABELA MERCED**
Time to use that CPR training. Wow, she really can see the future.

**INT: HOSPITAL**
ADAM SCOTT's sister gives birth to Peter Parker, but no one says his name in case it counts as a contractual use of the character. DAKOTA JOHNSON is now blind and in a wheelchair.

**DAKOTA JOHNSON**
You may think I'm blind, but I see all three of you girls becoming spider-heroes in a much more interesting sequel.

**CELESTE O'CONNOR**
Oh dear, I think she's lost her superpowers…

**FIN**

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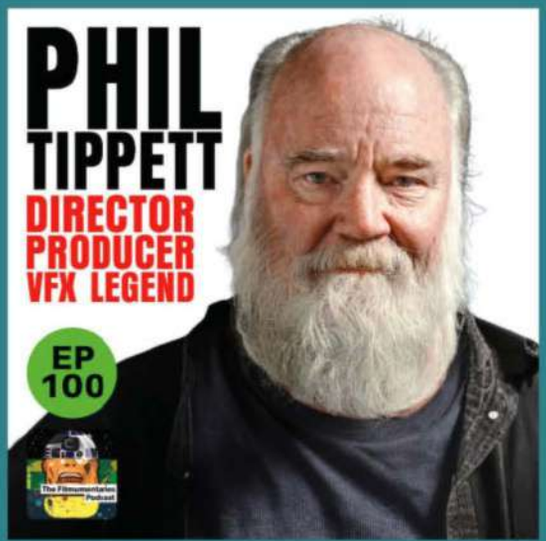


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